

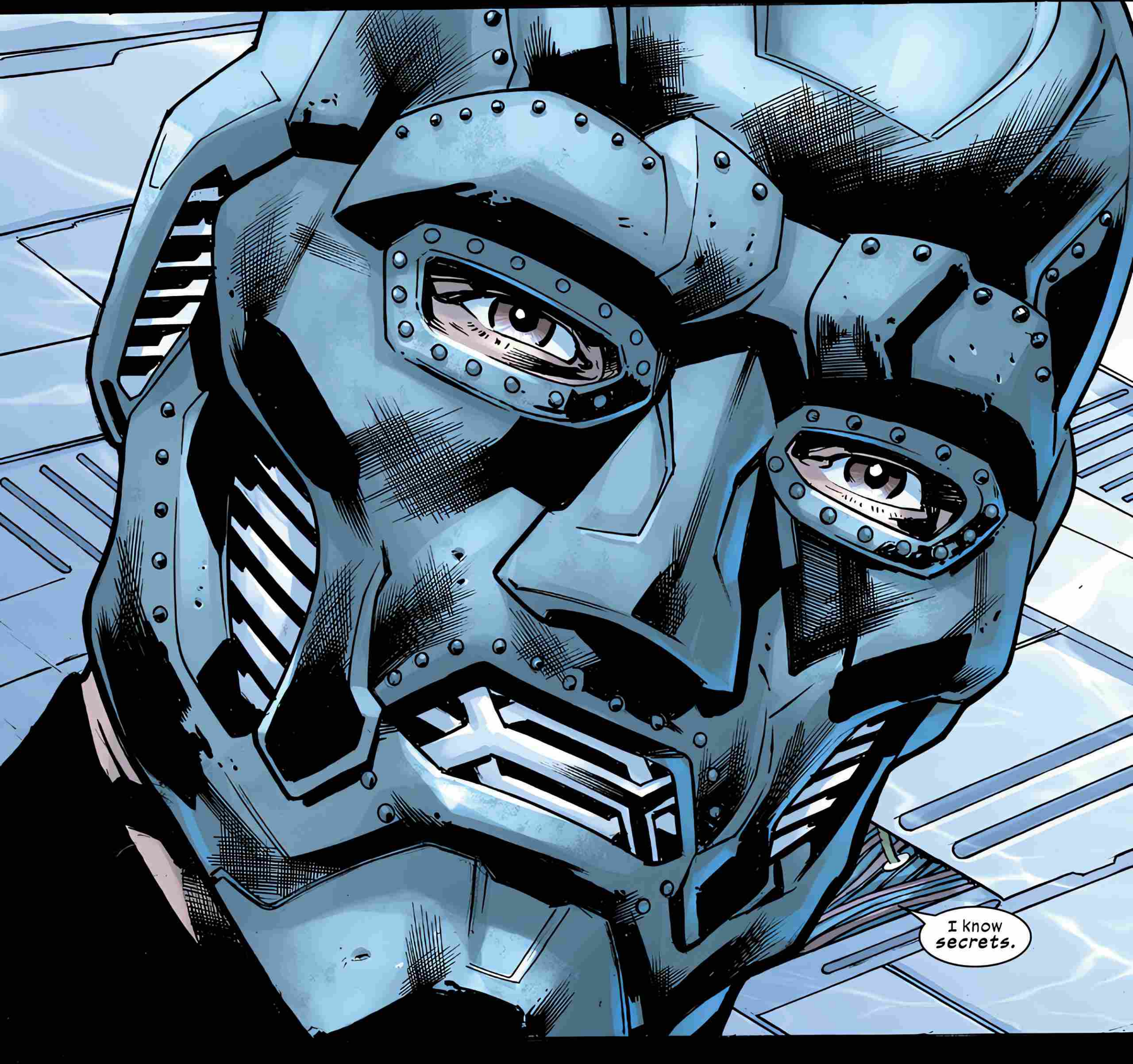
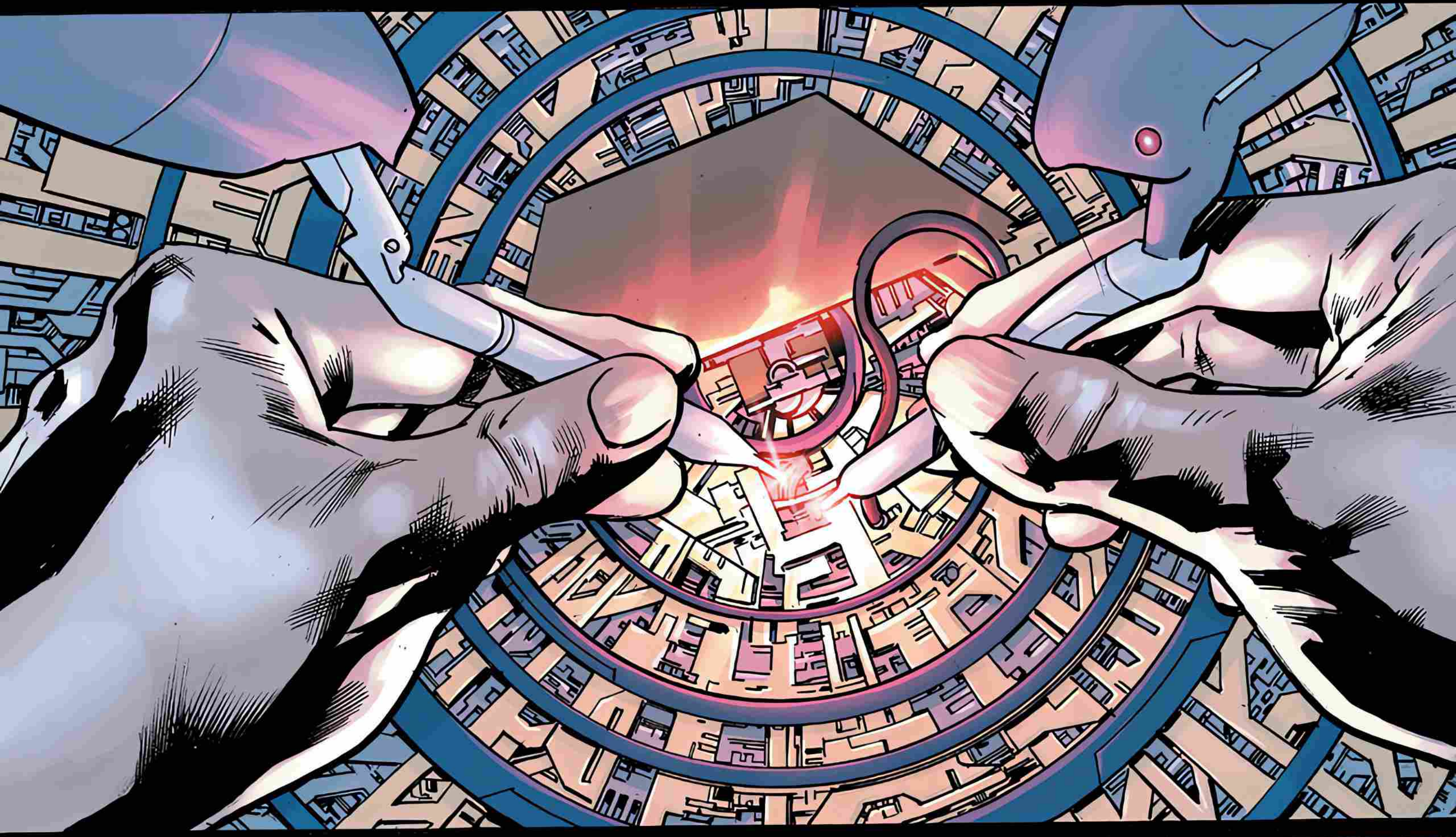
JONATHAN HICKMAN • BRYAN HITCH • ANDREW CURRIE • ALEX SINCLAIR

ULTIMATE INVASION

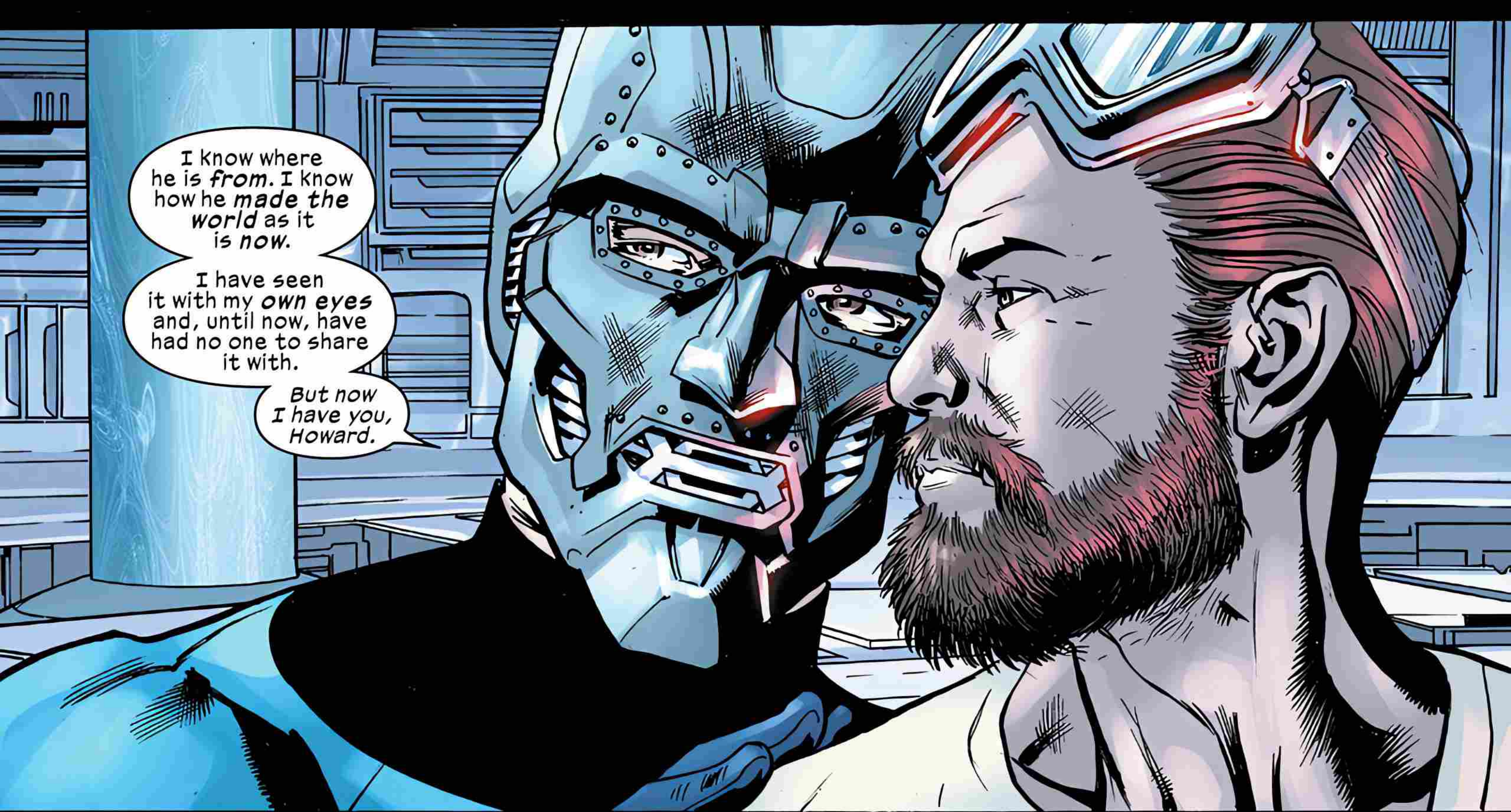


MARVEL

4







I know where he is *from*. I know how he *made the world* as it is now.

I have seen it with my *own eyes* and, until now, have had no one to share it with.

But now I have you, Howard.

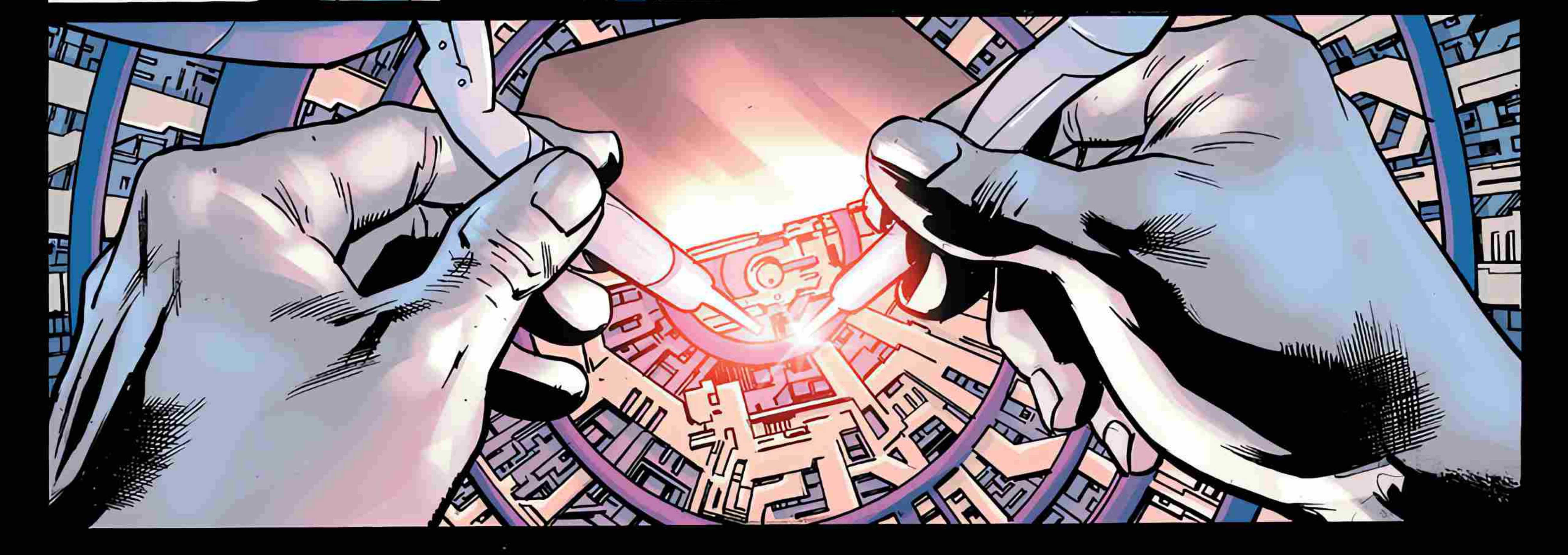


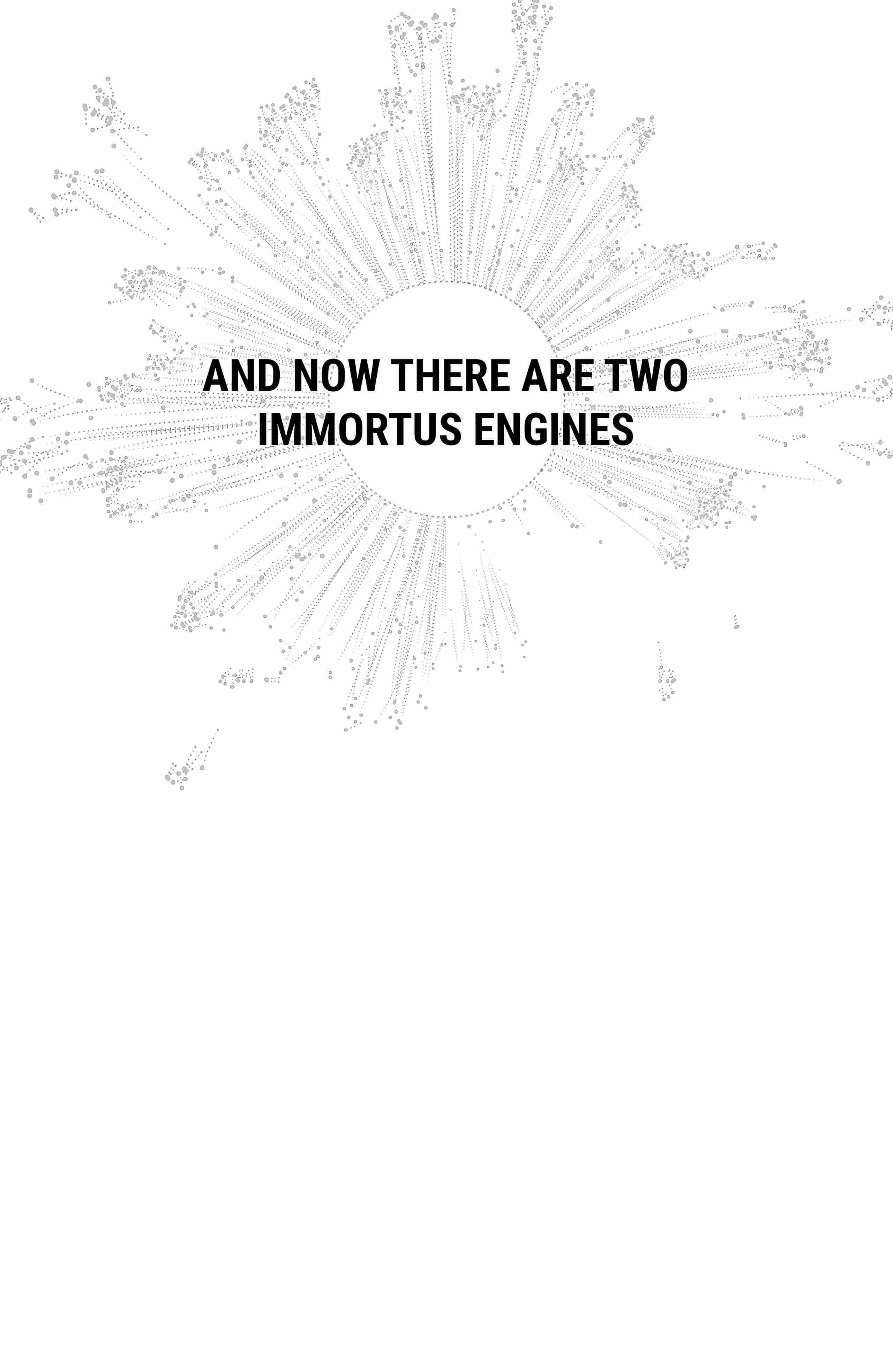
Do you want me to show you?



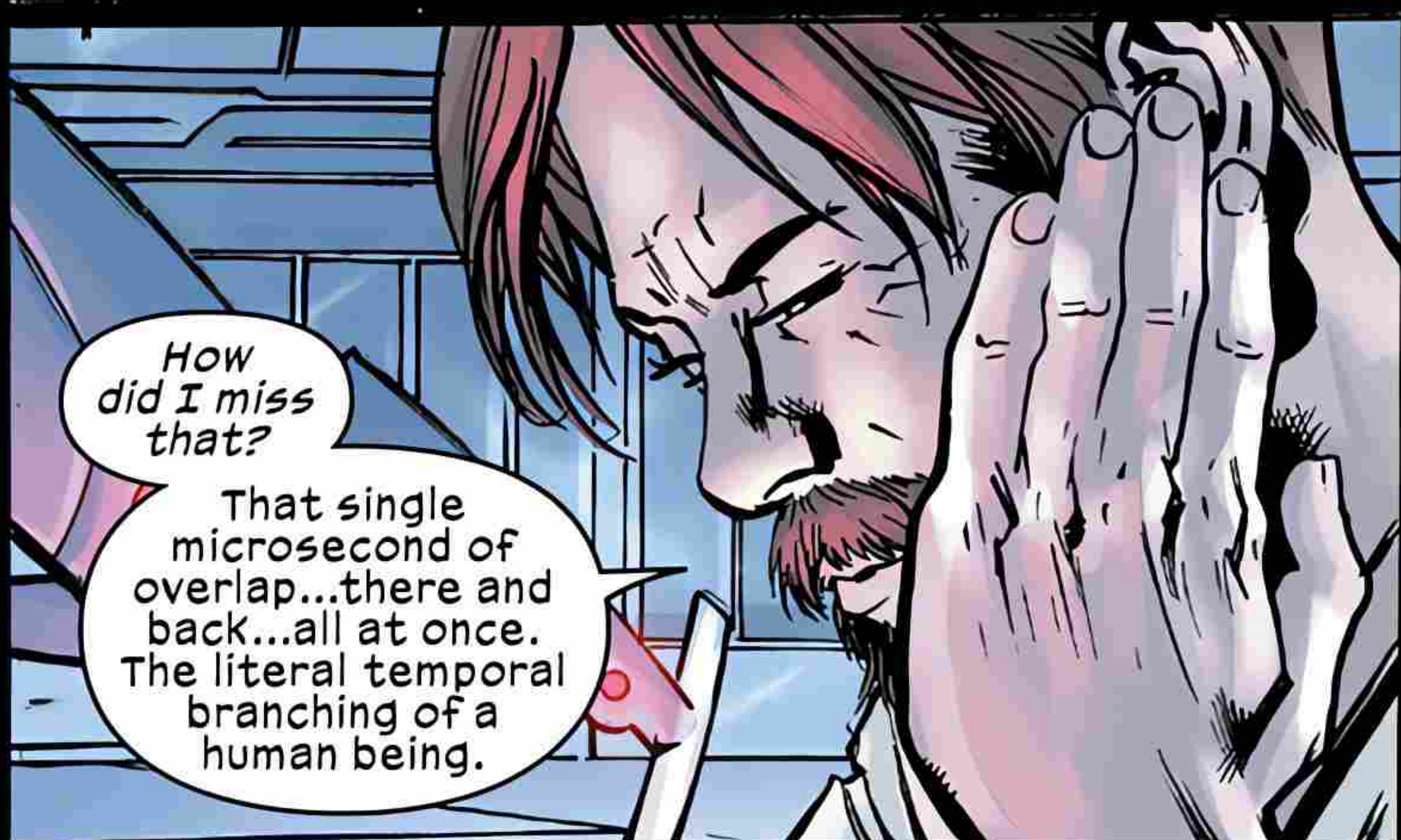
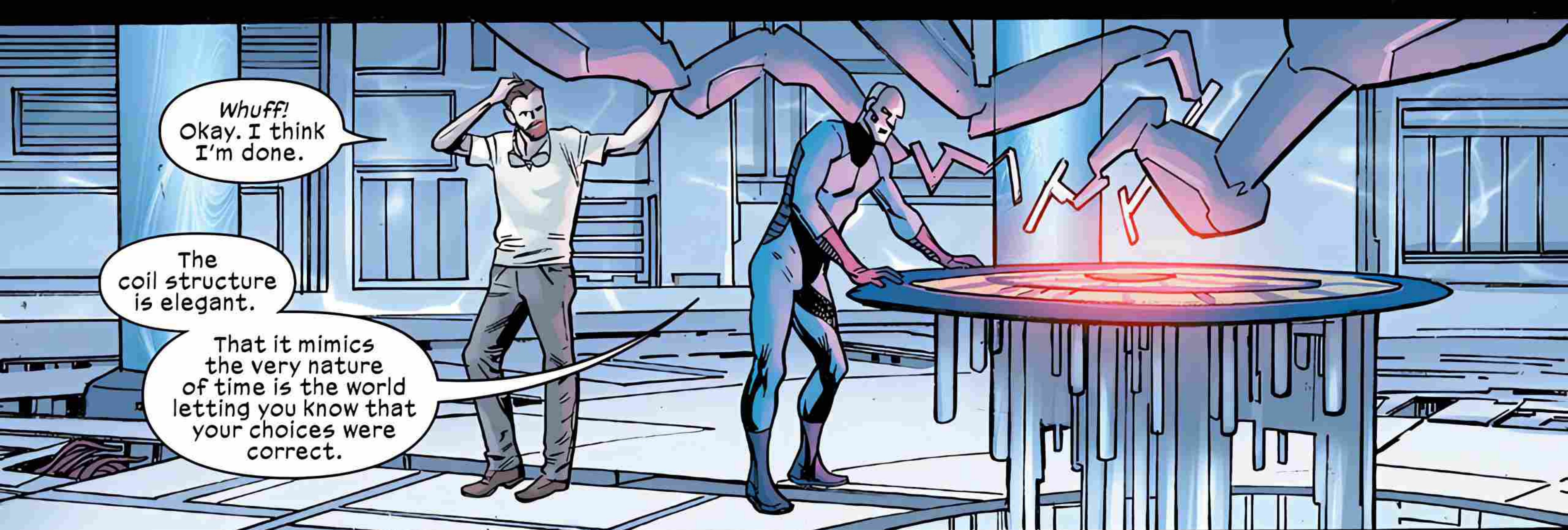
Absolutely. But first things first...

Because when I finish this, we just might have all the time in the world for the other.





**AND NOW THERE ARE TWO
IMMORTUS ENGINES**





You're in a temple of abstract time, Howard.

Exactly how does one count without constants? I gave up on marking days and the passing of time long ago.



I'm sorry. It never occurred to me... I never asked...

How long have you been here? Trapped in this place?

See that trickle of light there on the wall?



It's the right temperature and color. So at first I thought it was the uncorrupted sun, slowly creeping by as time passed. Seconds, minutes, hours... longer.



I marked its progress, counting the passing days, and then--after studying it for what I believed was months--I realized that it would ever-so-slightly speed up and slow down.

And then I considered the possibility that it didn't even begin when it should each day.



When I was sure I was right, I told him--I said it out loud--knowing he was watching, listening...

I heard his laughter--and I watched as the light suddenly moved up and down the wall--artificially reflected, I suppose, by some mechanized mirror he controlled--as if nodding its head in agreement.

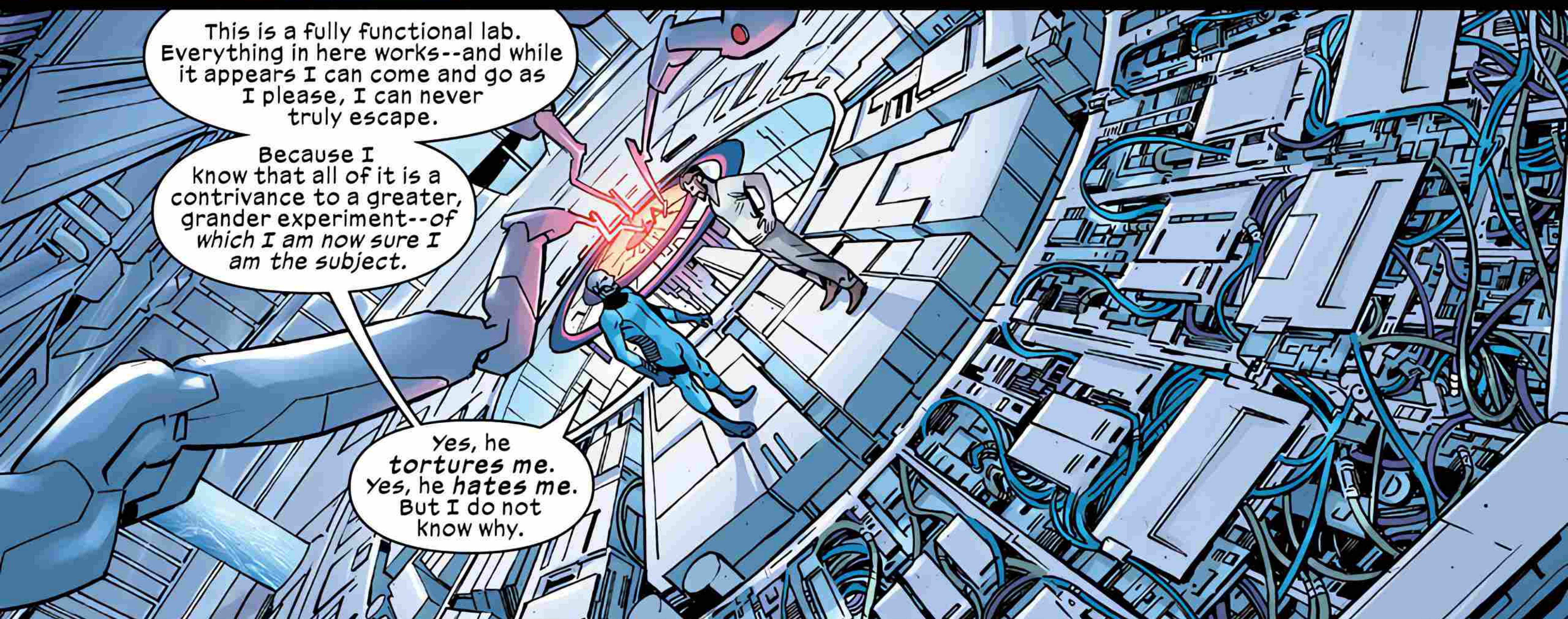
This was just the first of many games he has played with me.

Like the mask?



No. He's been very clear about that. This mask is no game at all.

It's who I really am.



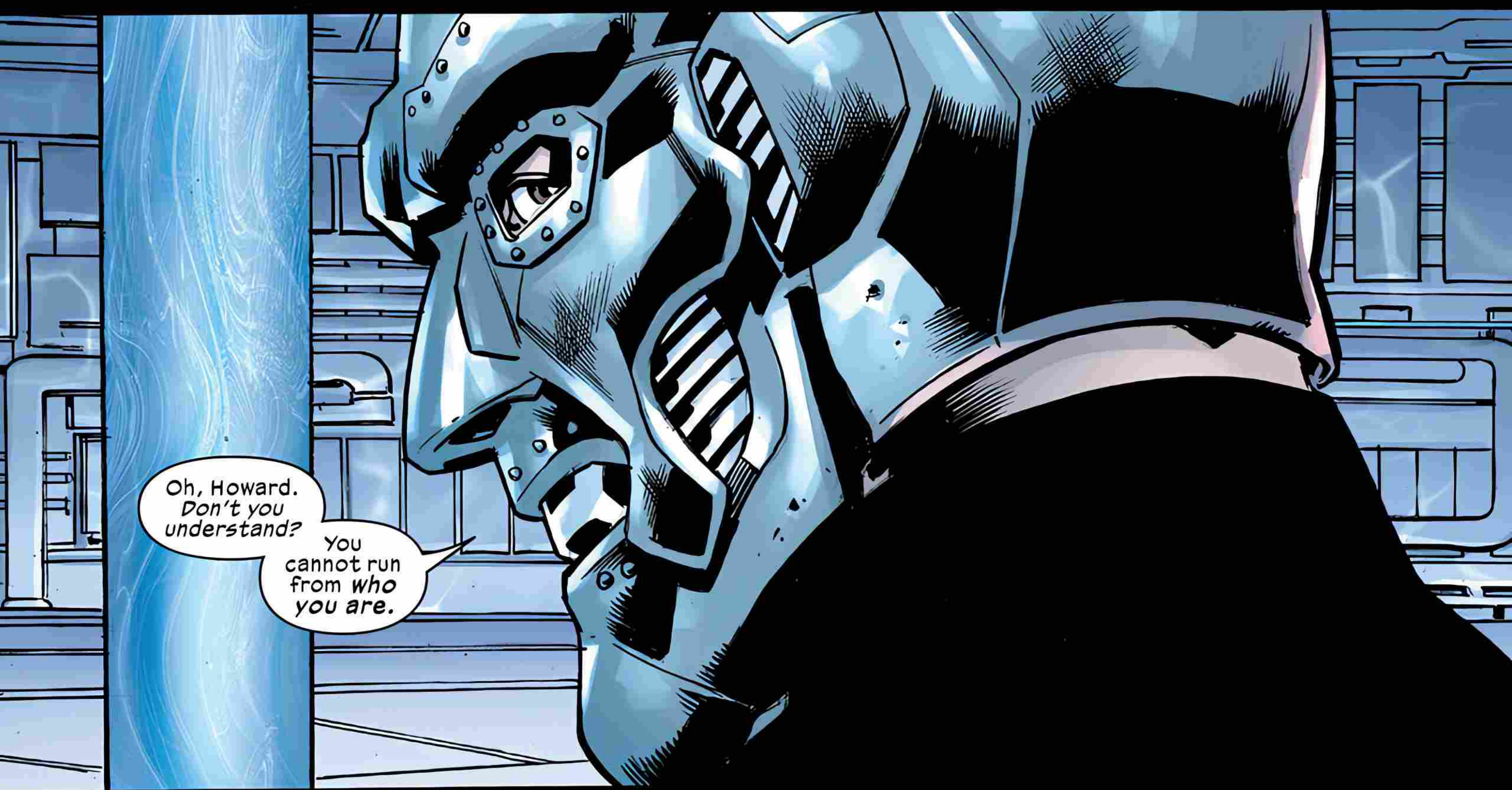
This is a fully functional lab. Everything in here works--and while it appears I can come and go as I please, I can never truly escape.

Because I know that all of it is a contrivance to a greater, grander experiment--of which I am now sure I am the subject.

Yes, he tortures me. Yes, he hates me. But I do not know why.



I can help you escape.

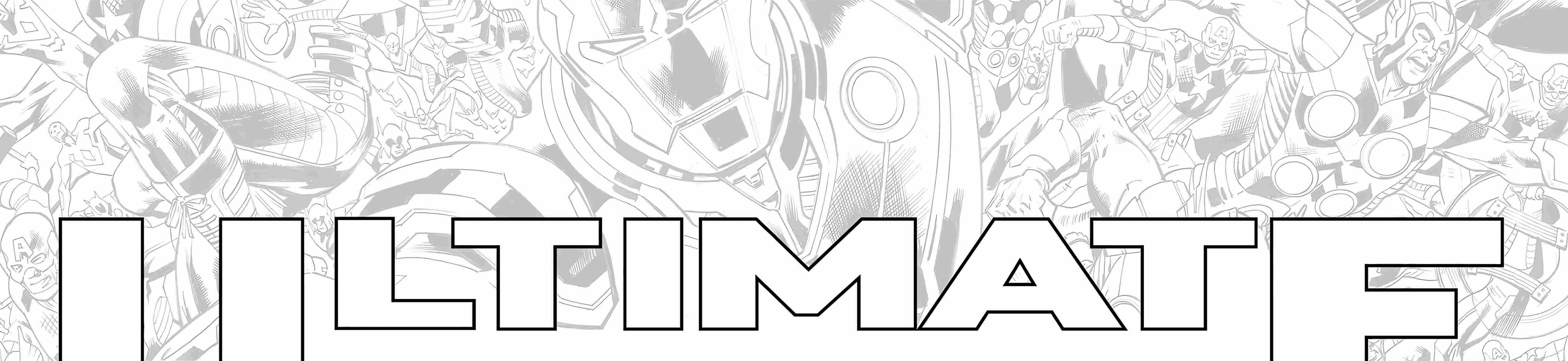


Oh, Howard. Don't you understand?

You cannot run from who you are.



**CHAPTER FOUR:
“YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW”**



ULTIMATE INVASION

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The City.
One week later.

Ready?

The hologram
suit is *functional*. The
conduit terminator is
acceptable.

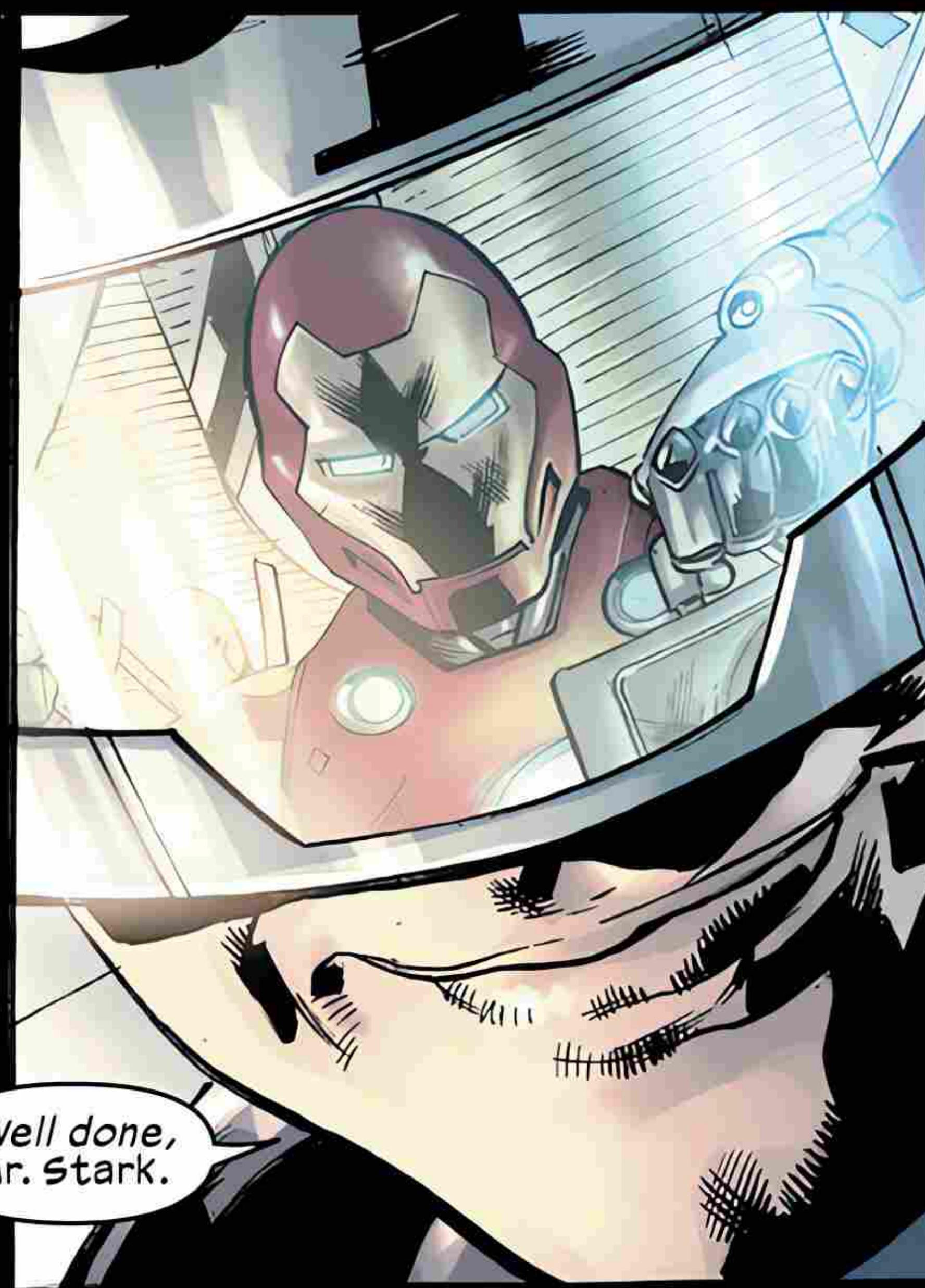
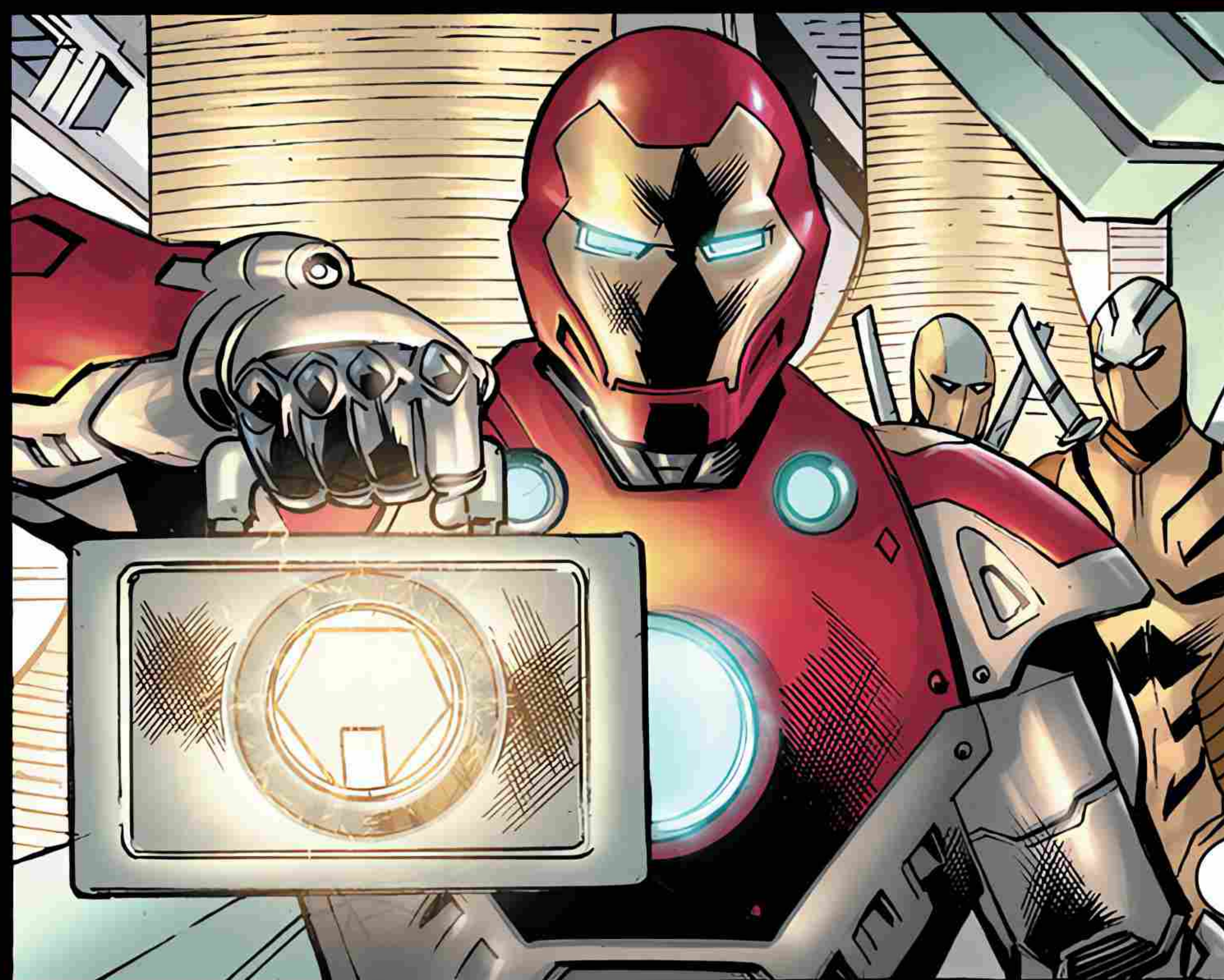
But my
psyche is...below
tolerable
thresholds.

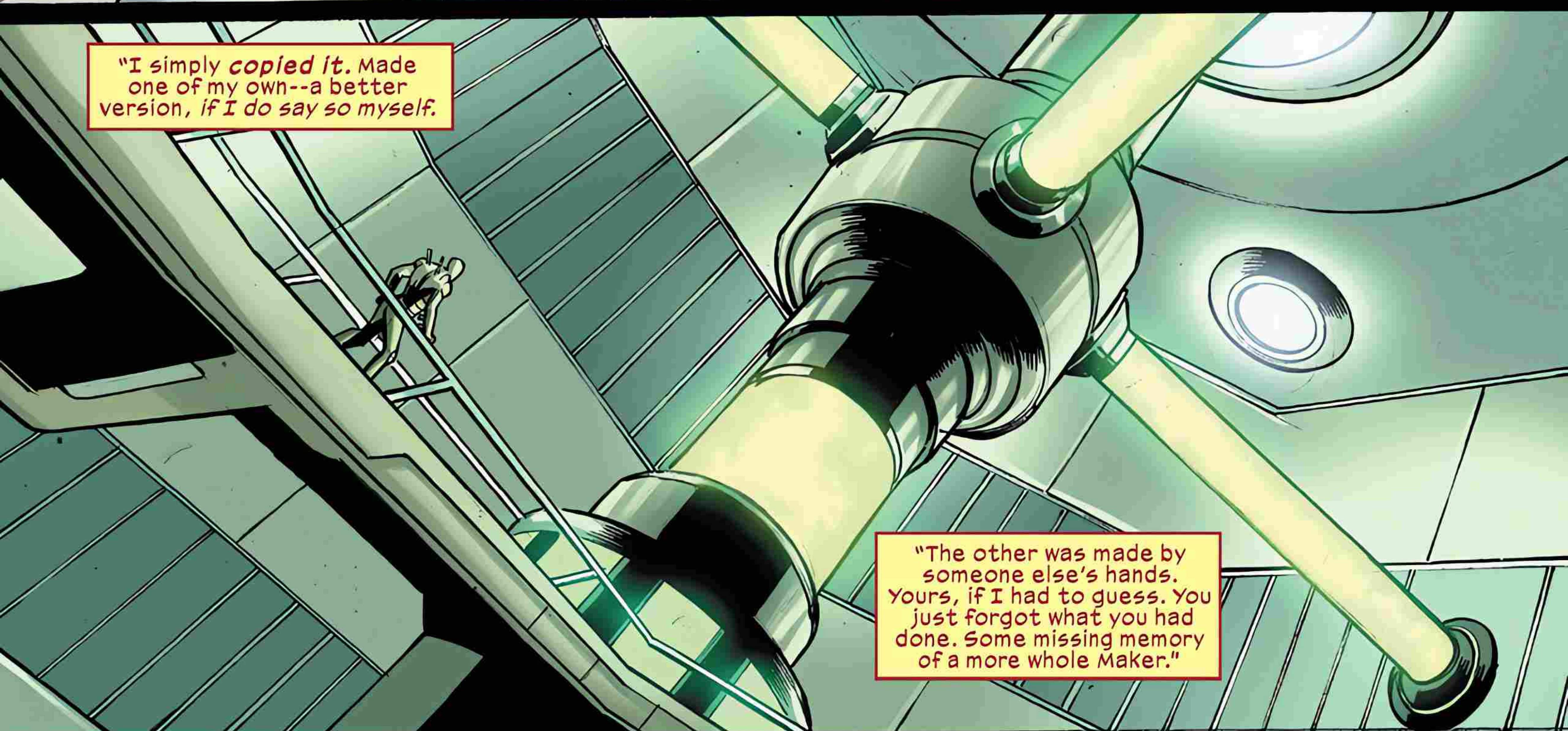
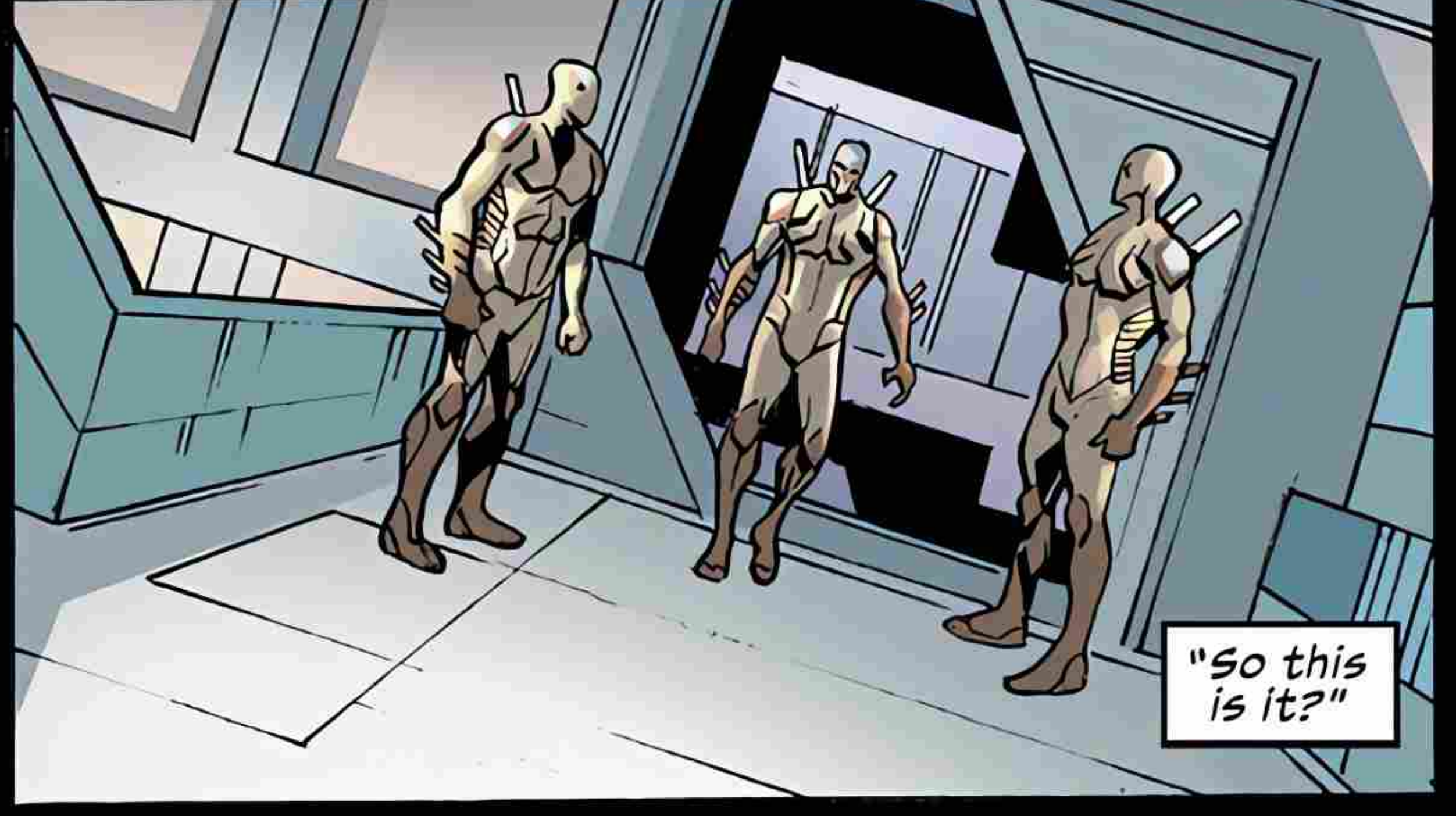
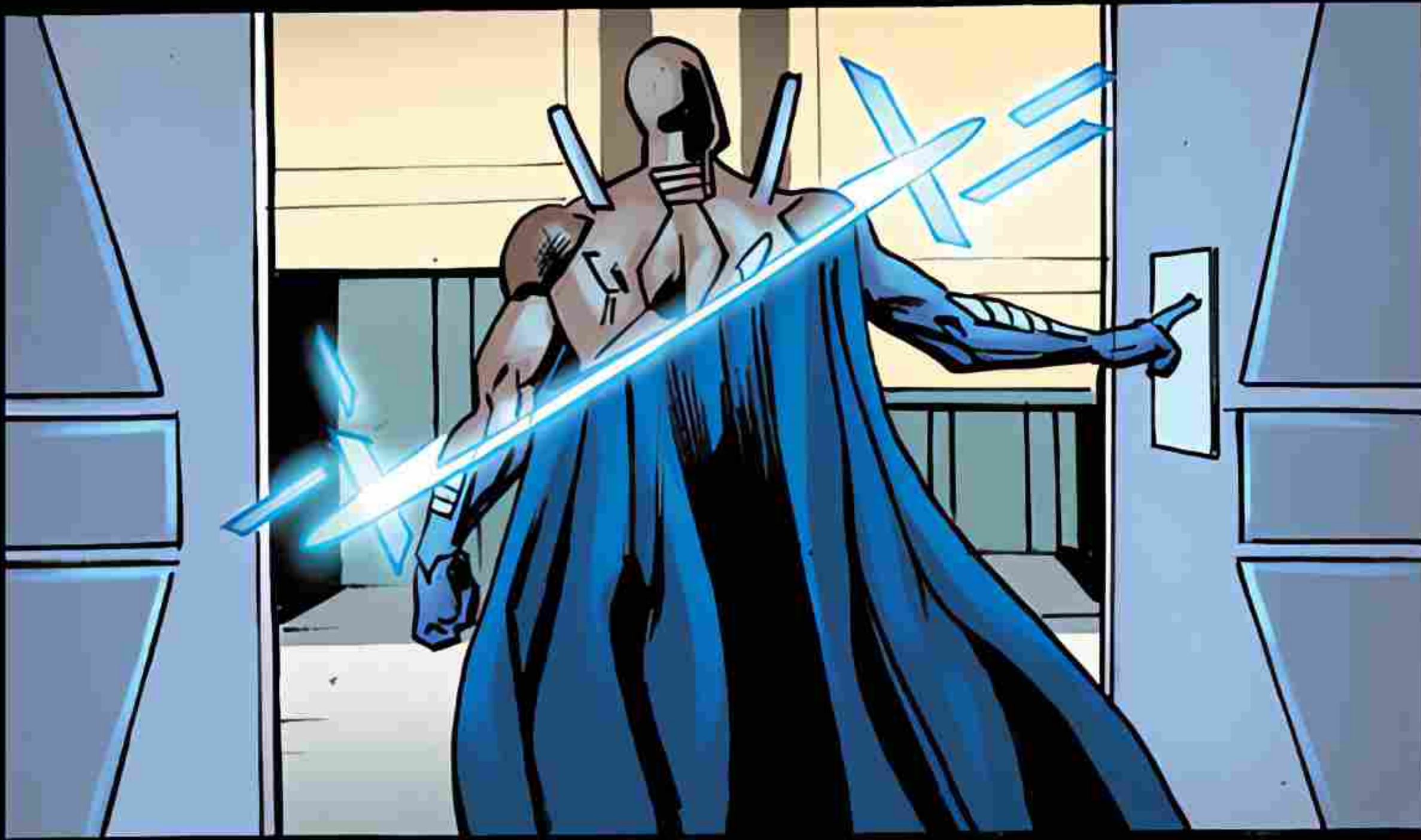
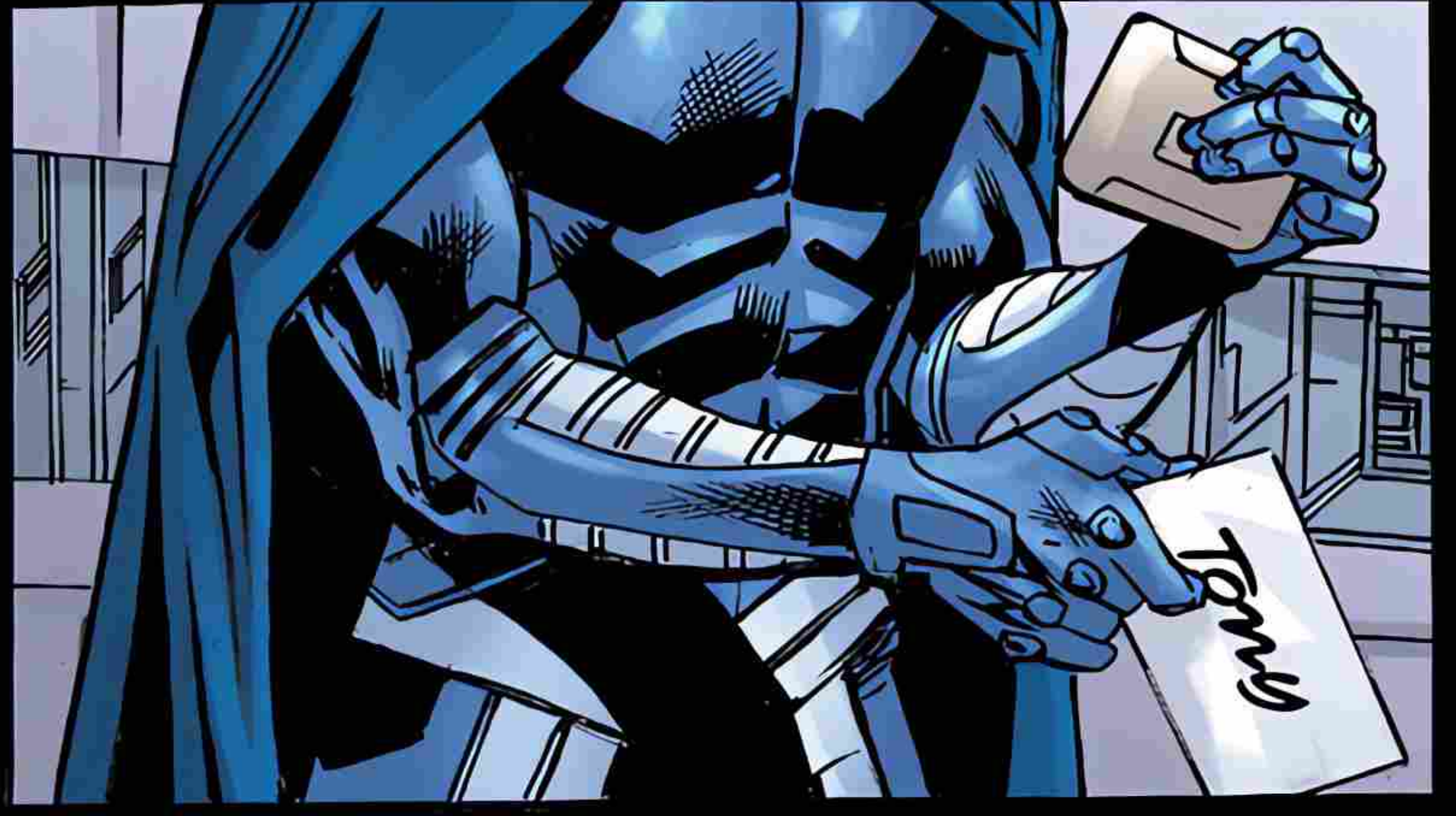
Ah. You're
worried this might
go wrong? That this is
goodbye or something
like that?

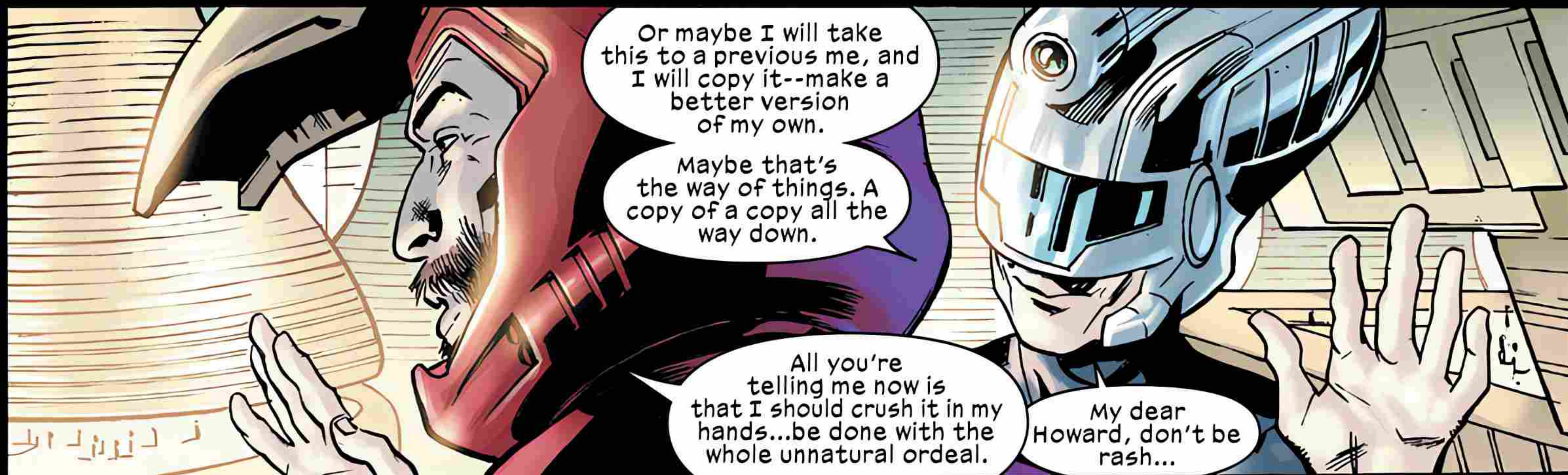
...
yes.

I
understand.
I feel the same
way. But it's
gonna be
okay...

I'll
see you on
the *other*
side.







Or maybe I will take this to a previous me, and I will copy it--make a better version of my own.

Maybe that's the way of things. A copy of a copy all the way down.

All you're telling me now is that I should crush it in my hands...be done with the whole unnatural ordeal.

My dear Howard, don't be rash...



"If I have done anything, surely I have shown you that, before all other things, we have a monster from the future who we have to kill."

Power conduit terminator armed.



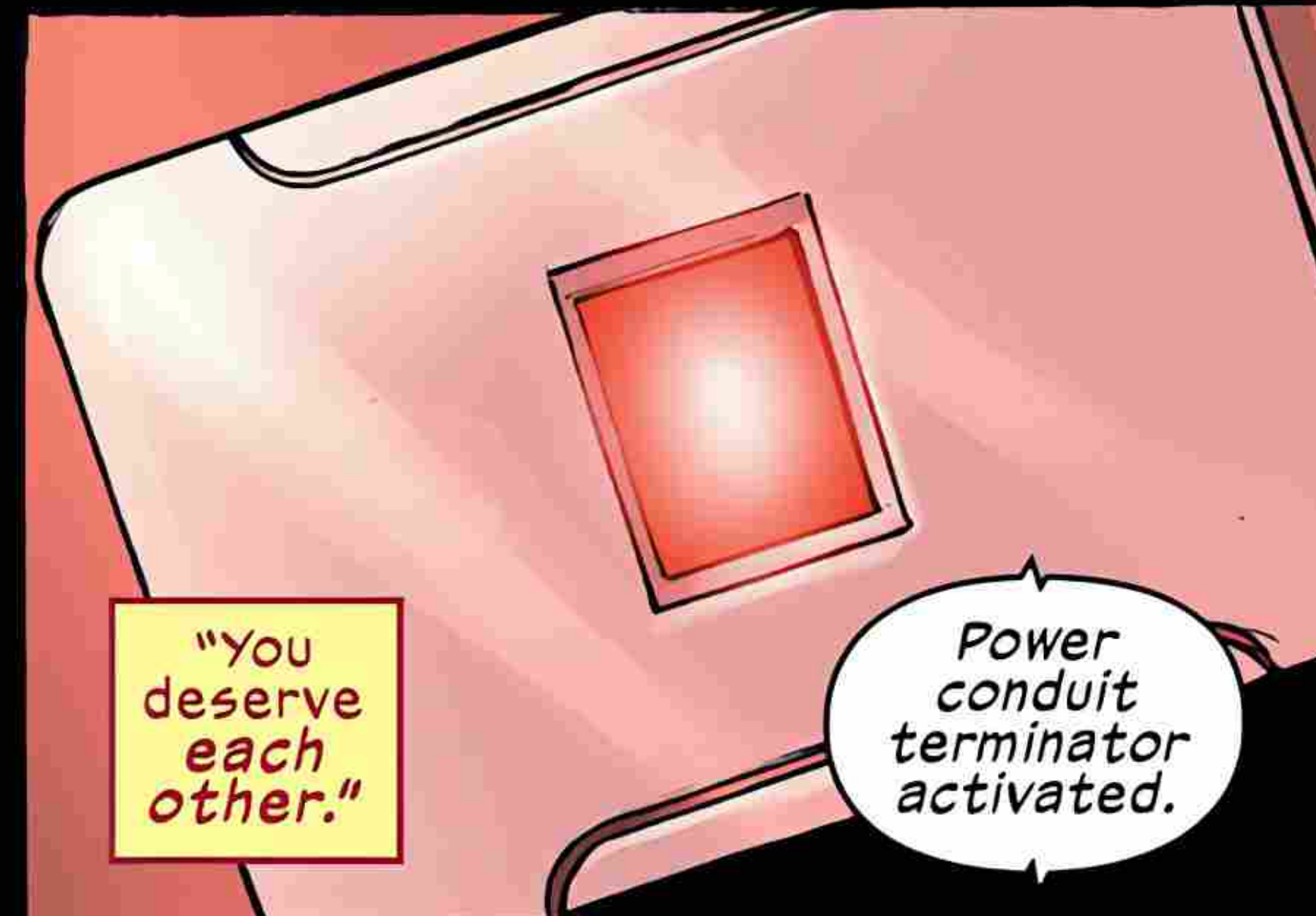
He's a monster. You're a monster.

I am so tired of choosing between which monsters are more acceptable.



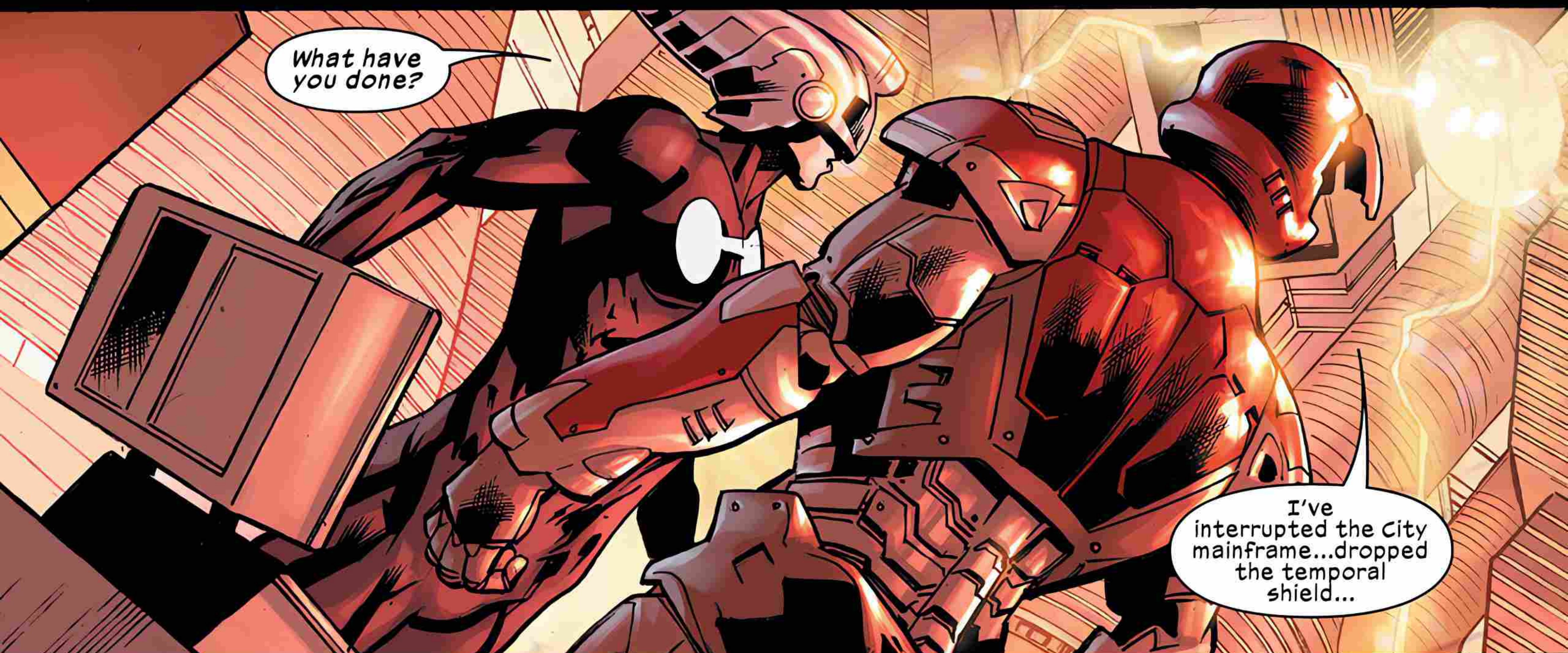
Power conduit terminator linked. Remote access granted.

"You don't deserve me."



"You deserve each other."

Power conduit terminator activated.



What have you done?

I've interrupted the City mainframe...dropped the temporal shield...





Power conduit terminator reactivated.

"And now we've locked them inside the City along with you."



There, my loyal legions...there he is.

There is no cost too high to pay--the Maker dies at any price.

Are all targets acceptable?



"All but one."

CHILDREN OF TOMORROW!

DEFEND YOUR CITY!

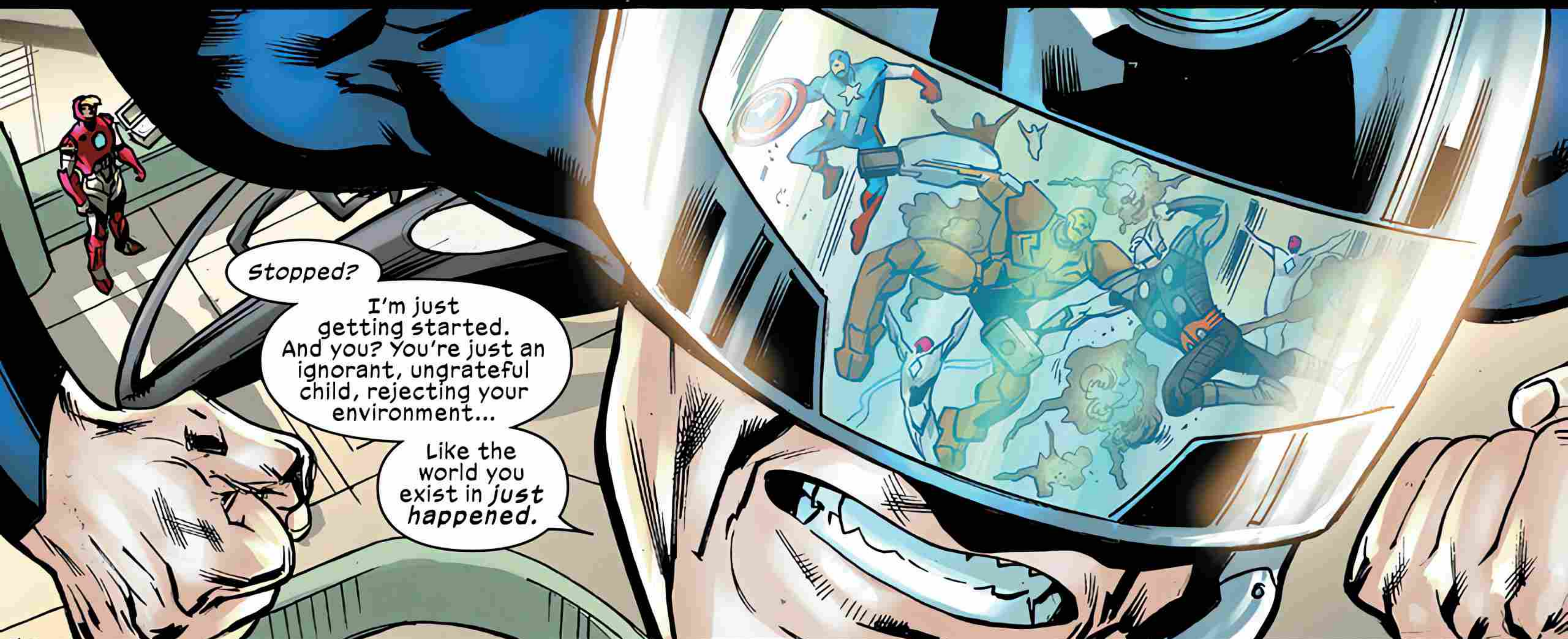




I can see those wheels spinning, Mr. Stark.

You've decided to play your own game, haven't you?

This isn't a game! You need to be stopped!



Stopped?

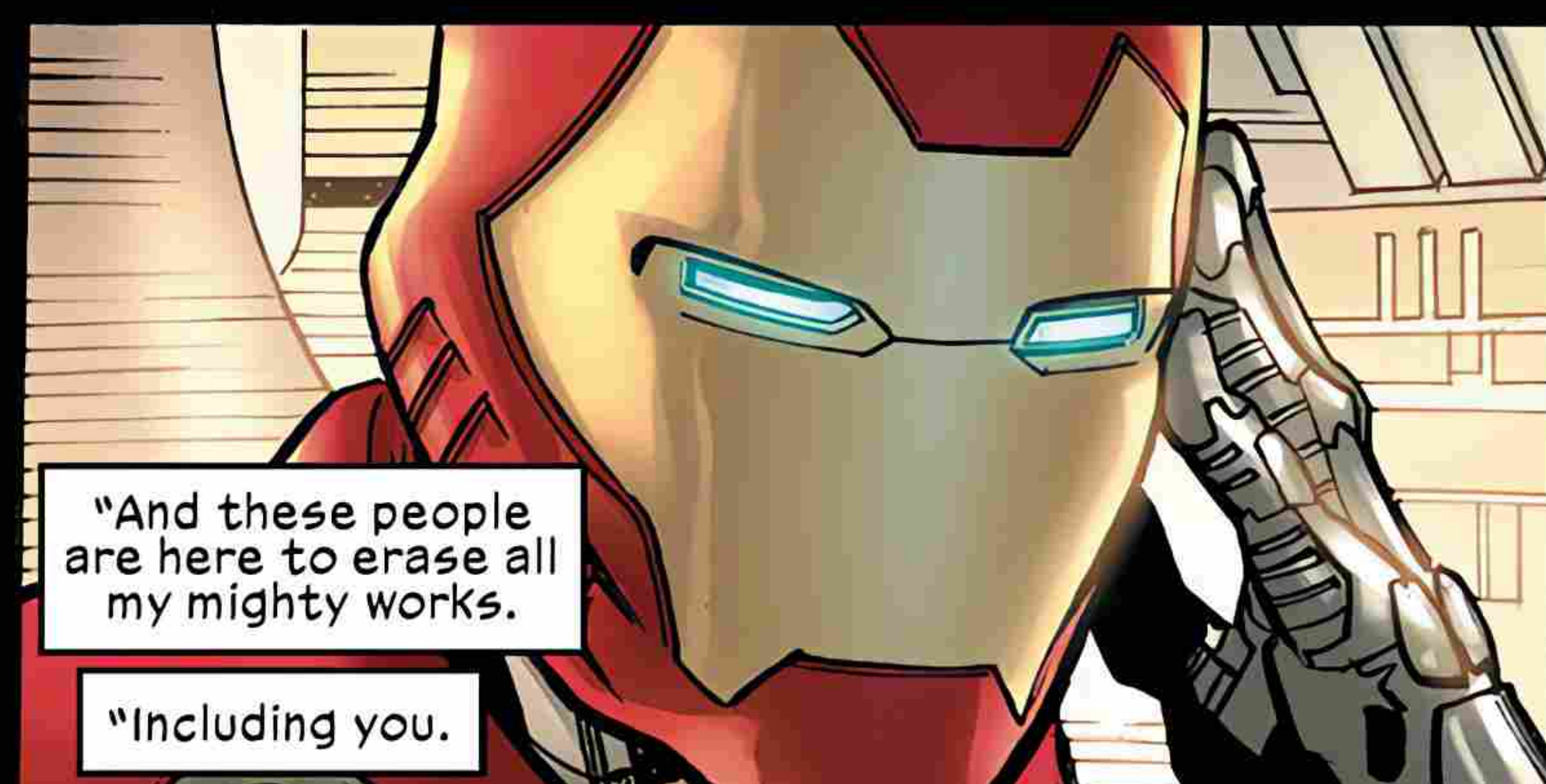
I'm just getting started. And you? You're just an ignorant, ungrateful child, rejecting your environment...

Like the world you exist in just happened.



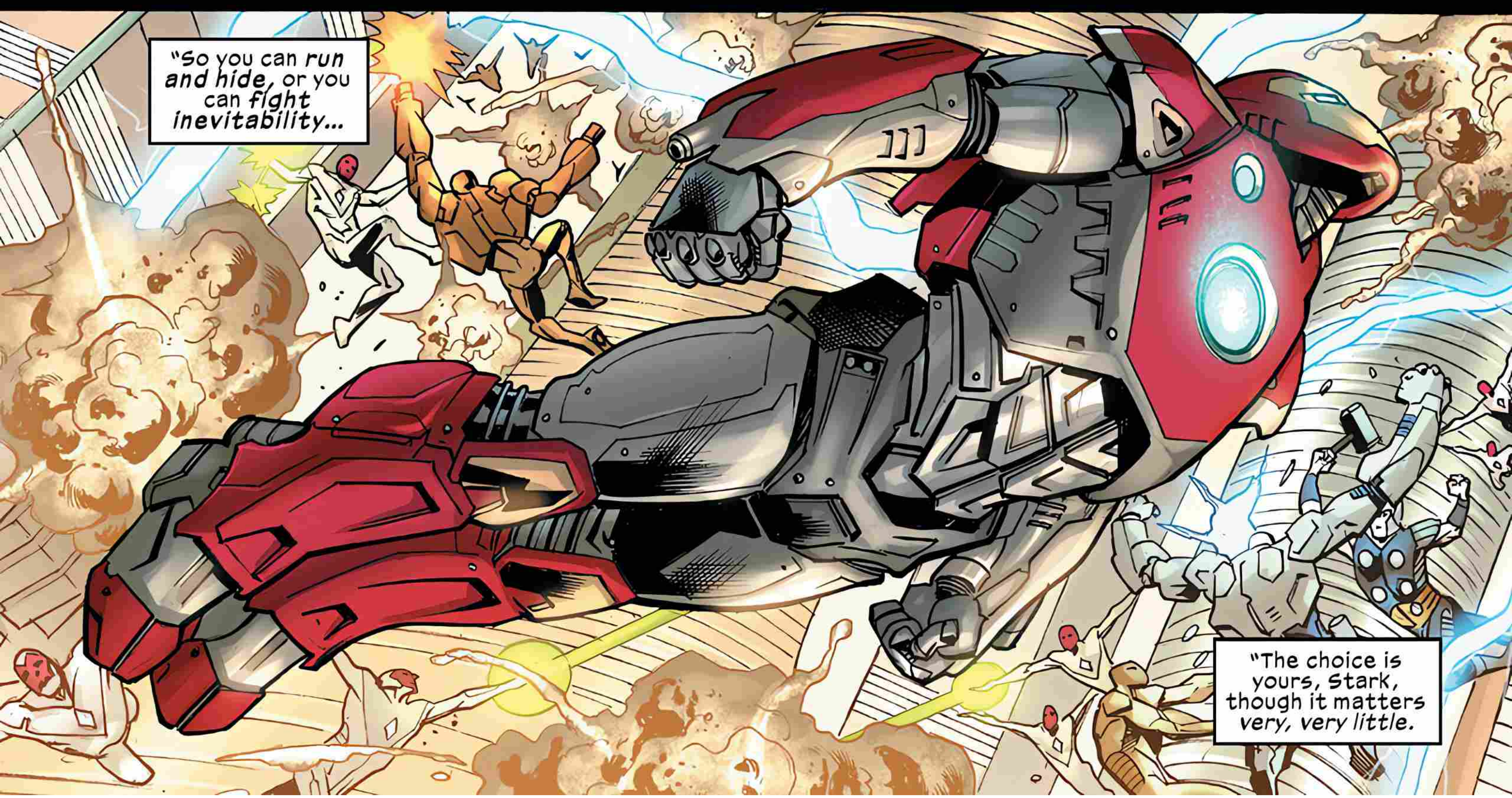
"Well, it didn't just happen..."

"I happened."



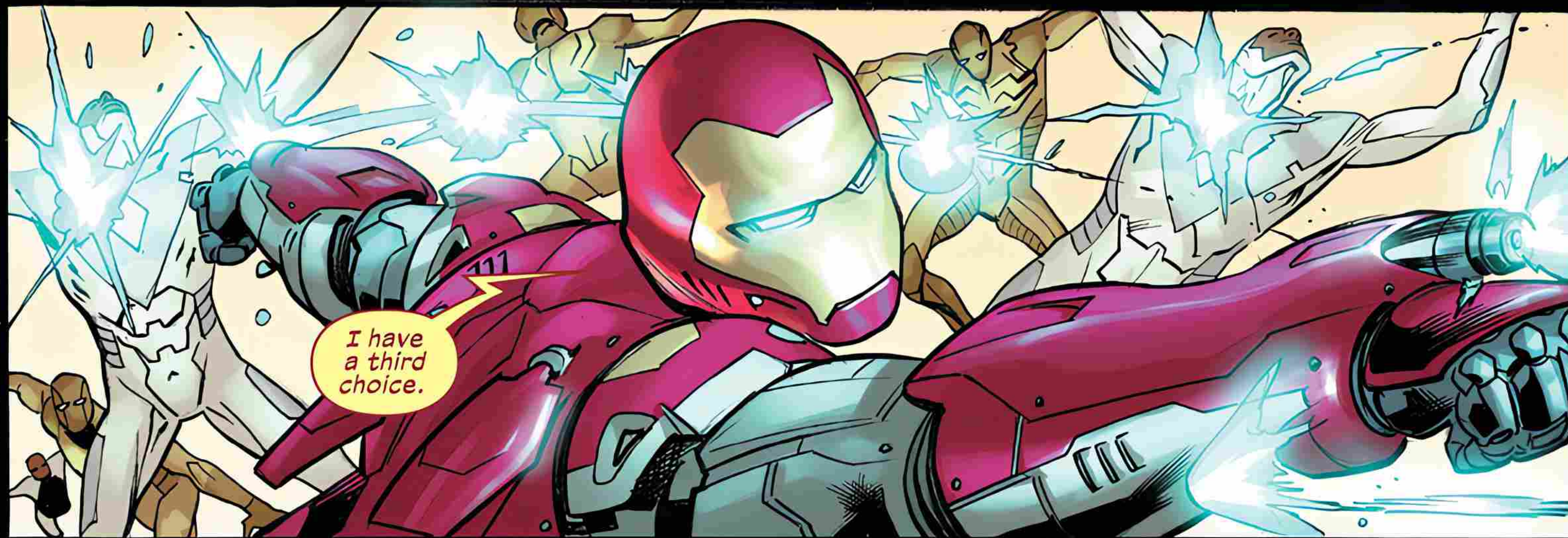
"And these people are here to erase all my mighty works."

"Including you."



"So you can run and hide, or you can fight inevitability..."

"The choice is yours, Stark, though it matters very, very little."





Stop him!
Stop--
HURKK!

Pawns!
Pointless creatures!
I understand why you do
what you do. What else
could anyone expect from
something designed
at creation
to die.

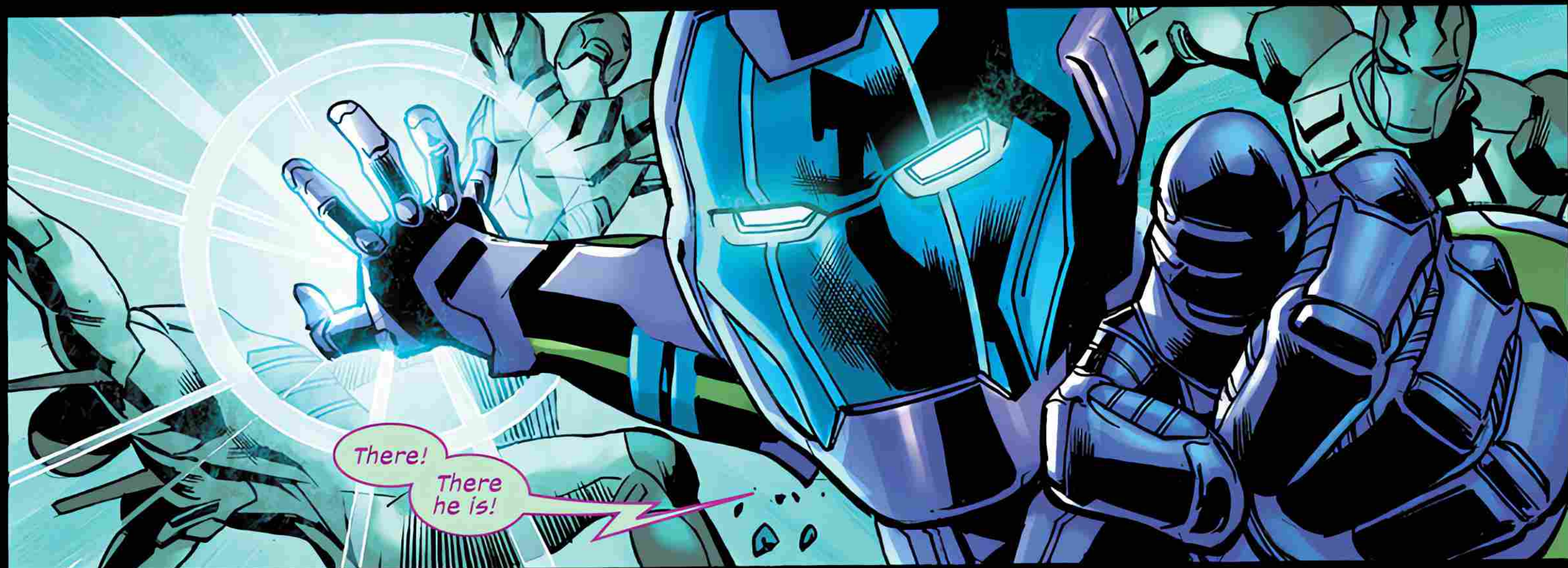
But you
are *delaying*
what *has to*
happen.



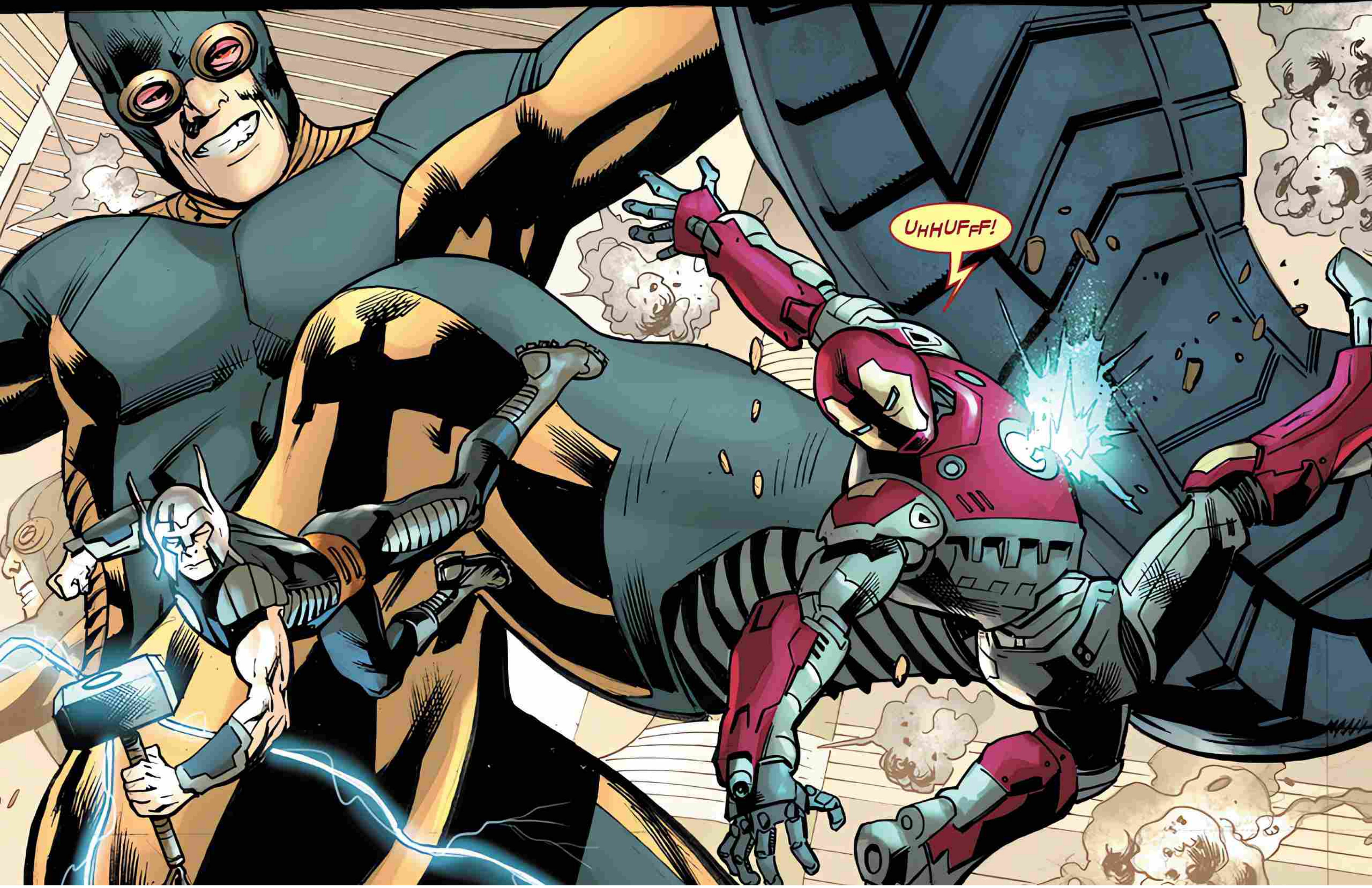
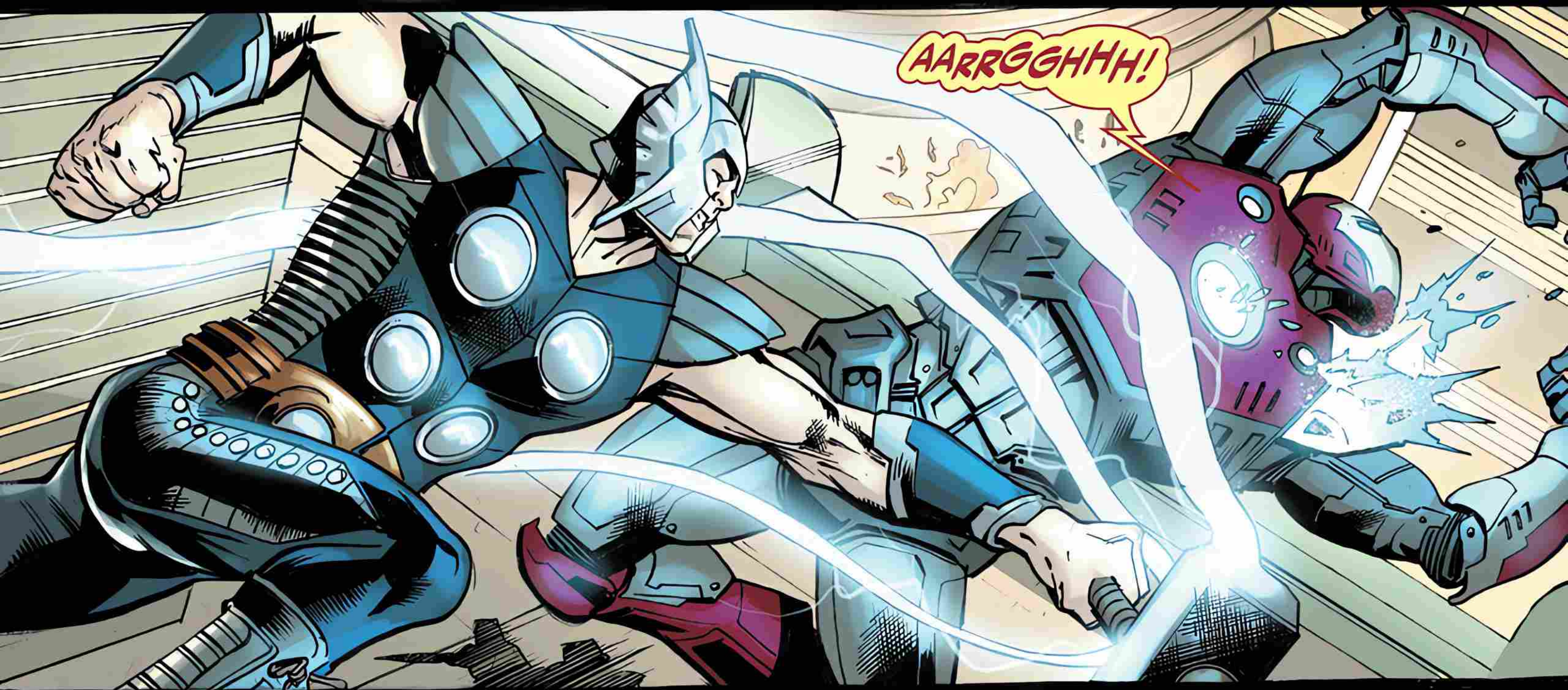
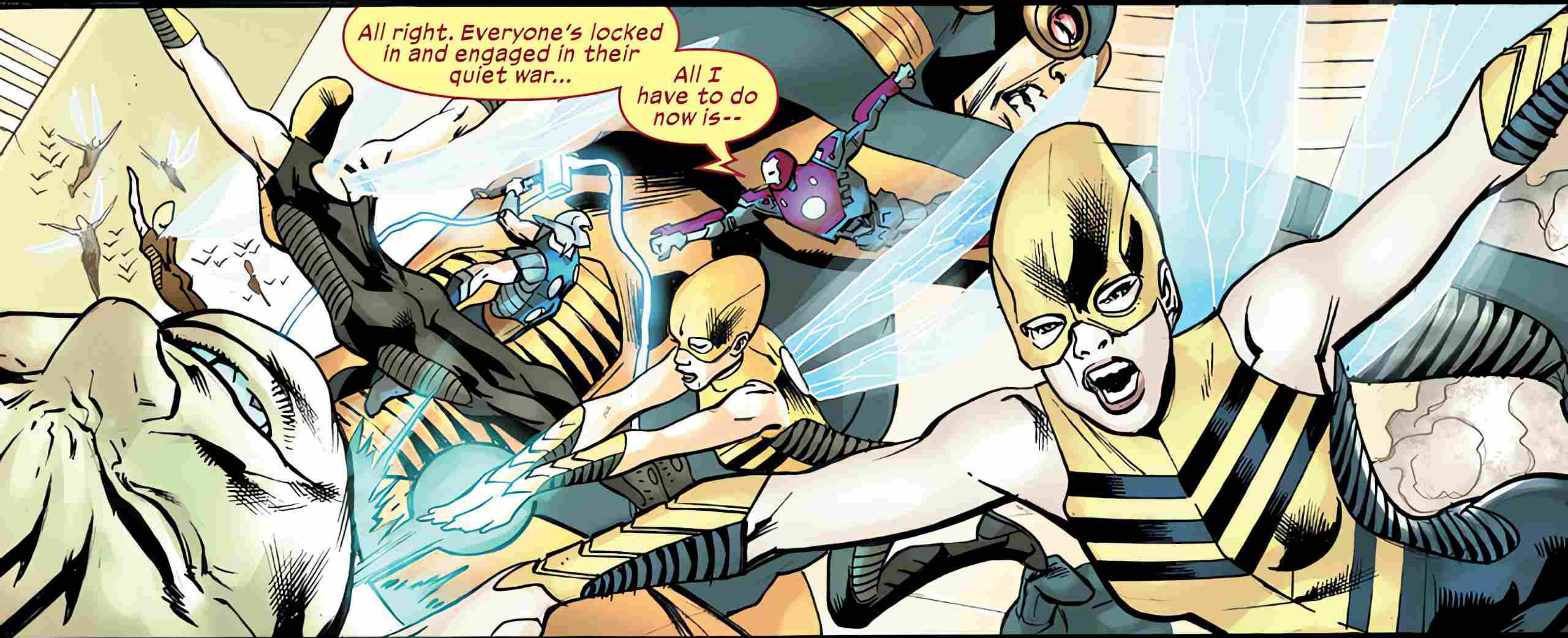
stop all this
obstruction--
serve your real
purpose...

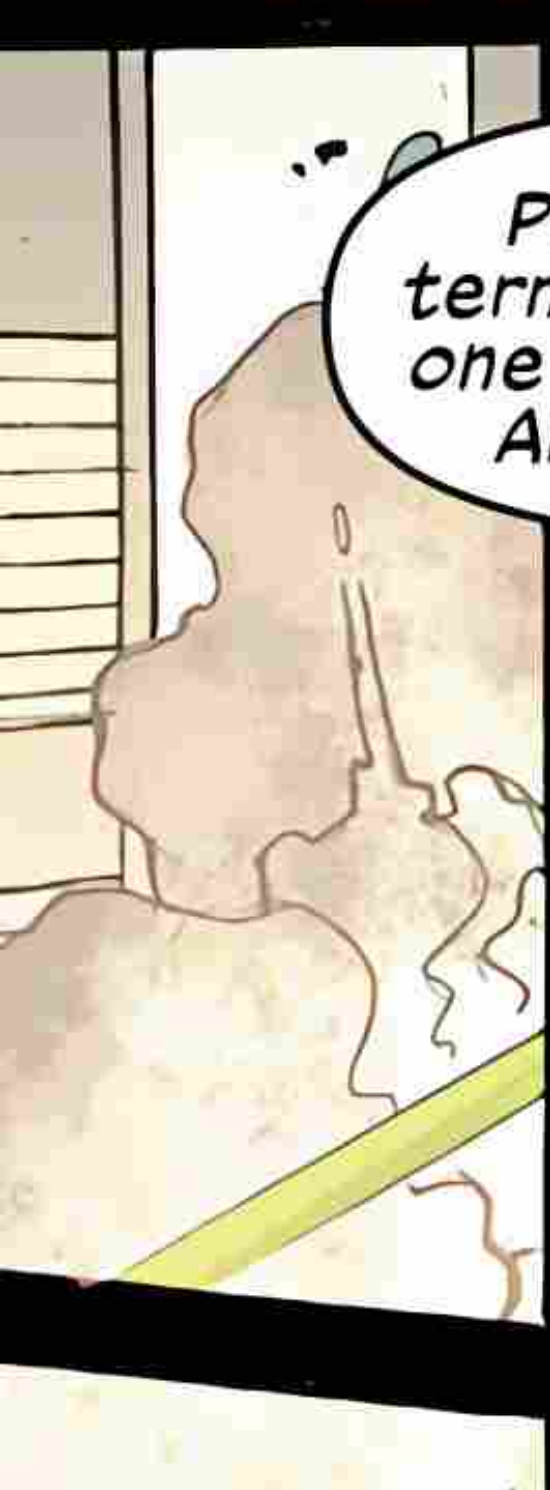
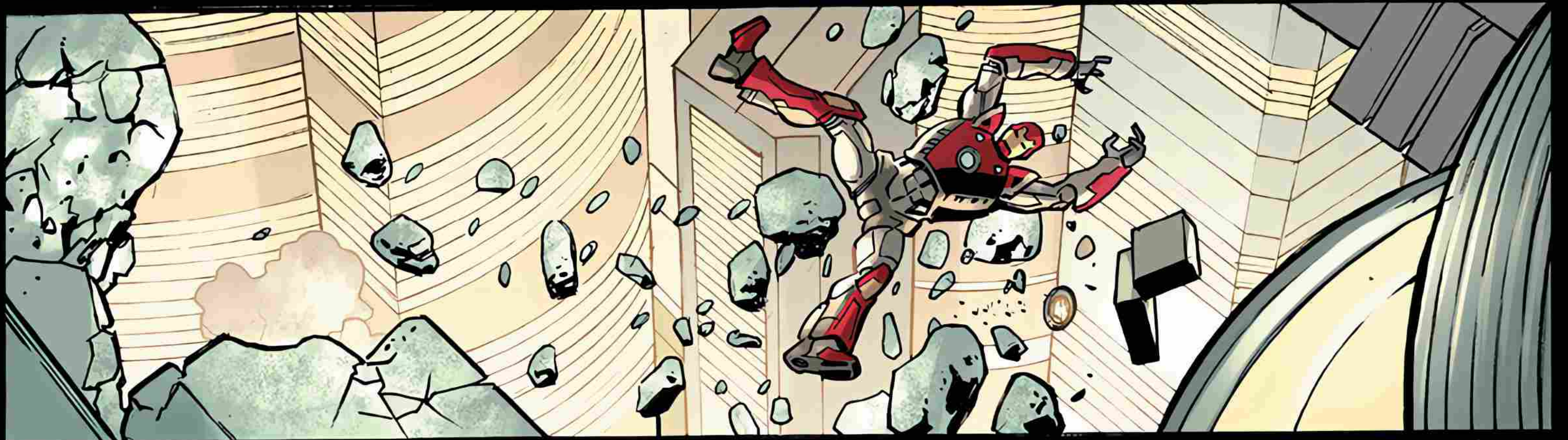
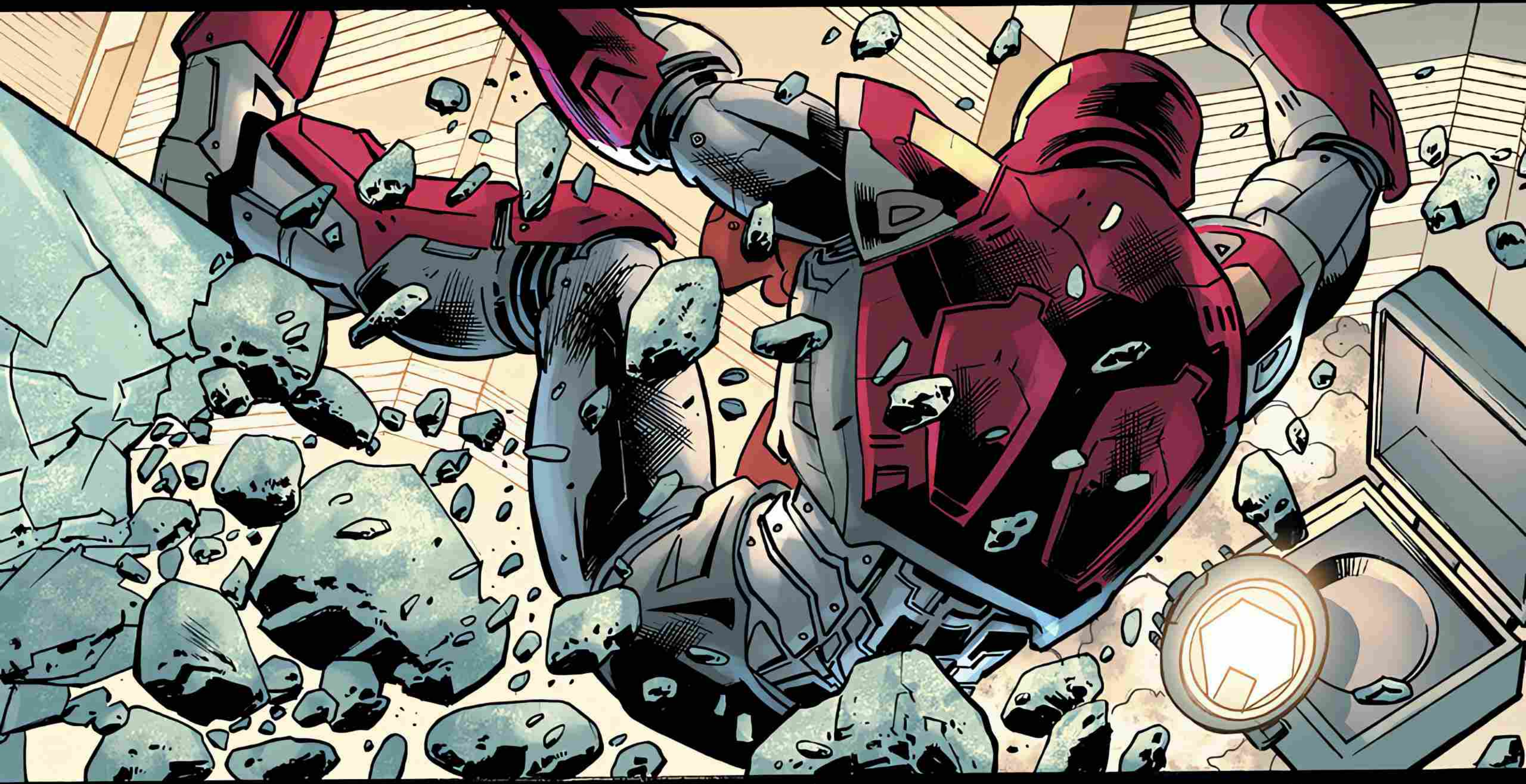


...AND
BRING ME
KANG!





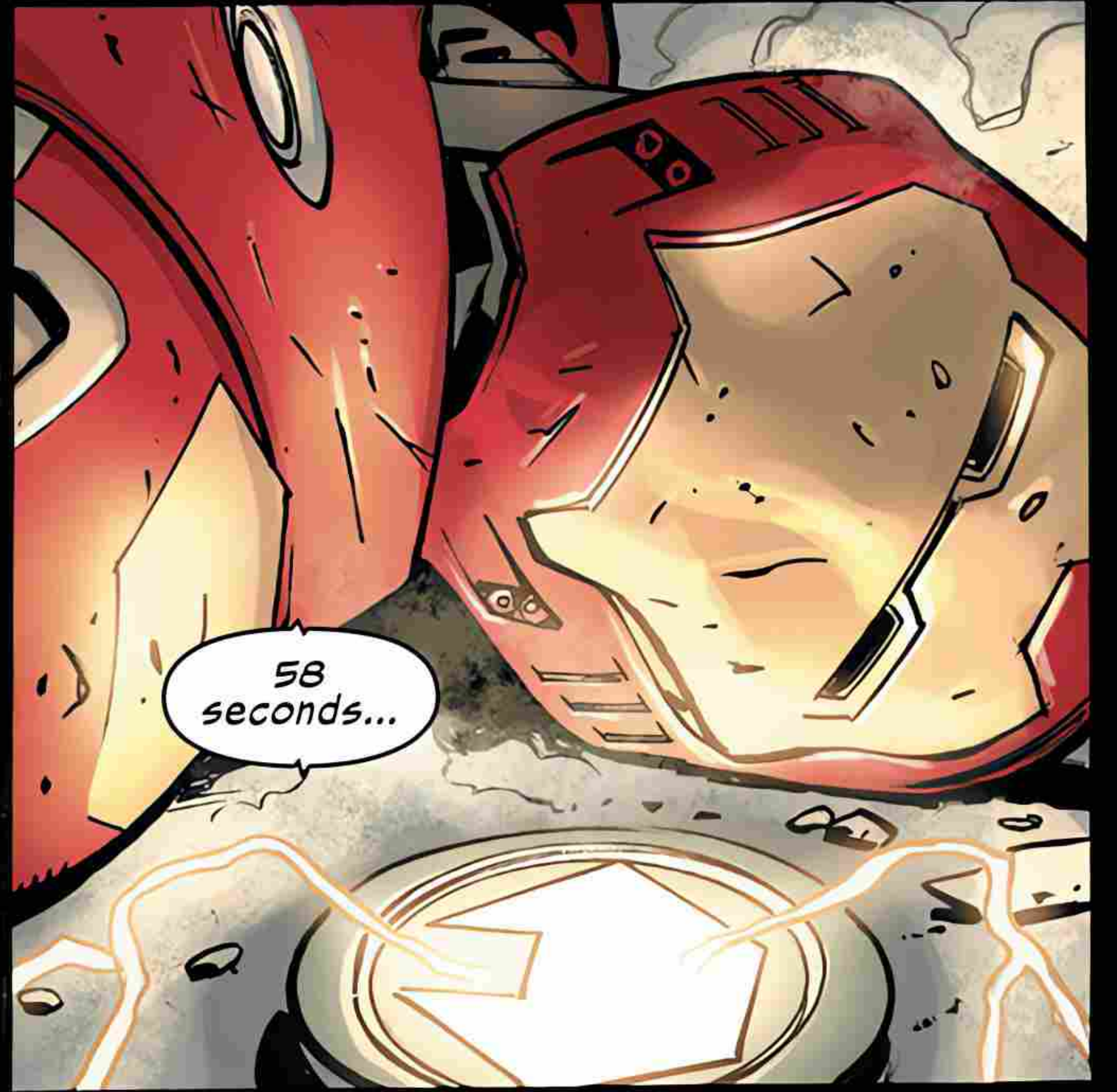




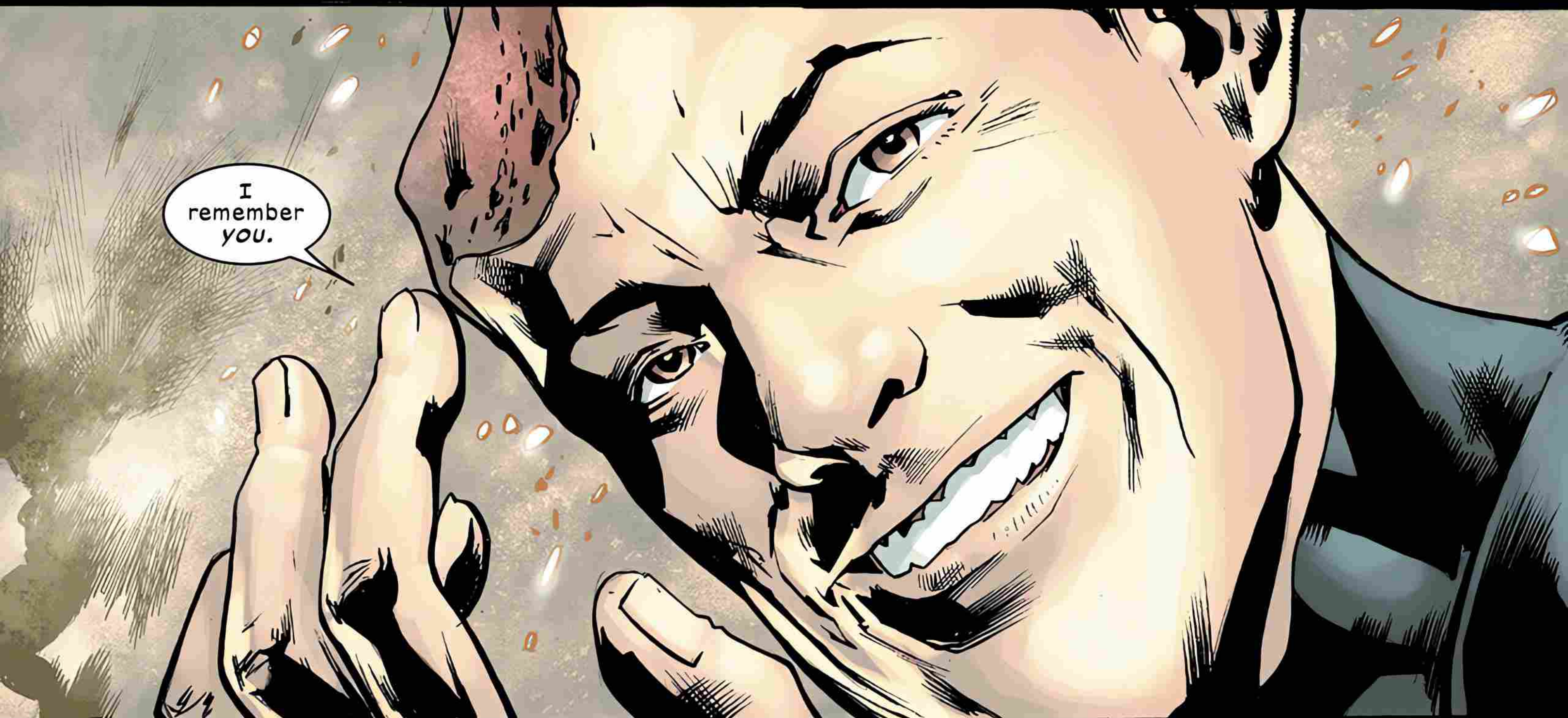
Power conduit
terminator surge in
one minute. Armed.
And activated.



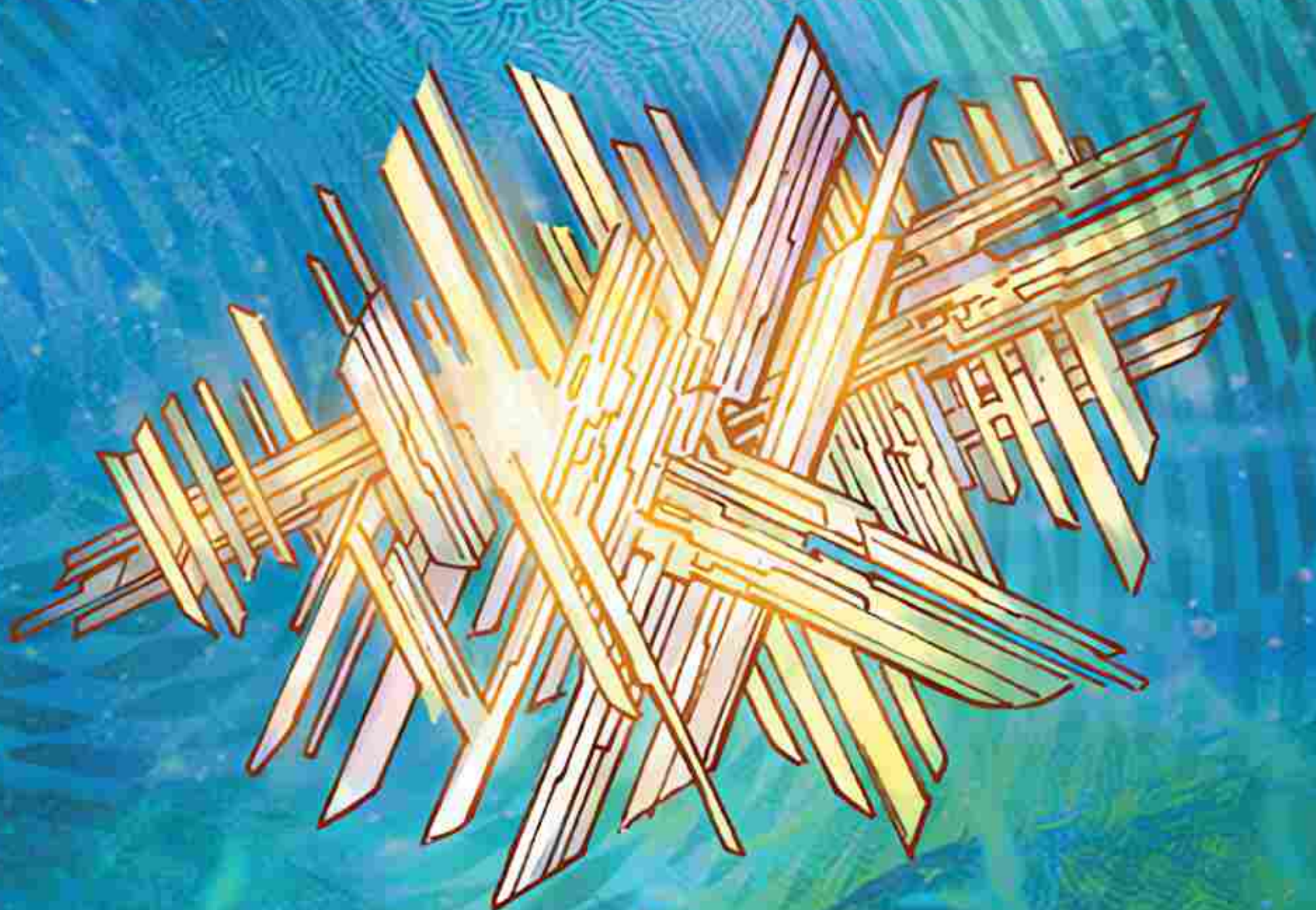
59
seconds...



58
seconds...



The Far Future.



Then.

I
had to
know.

Hmmmm?



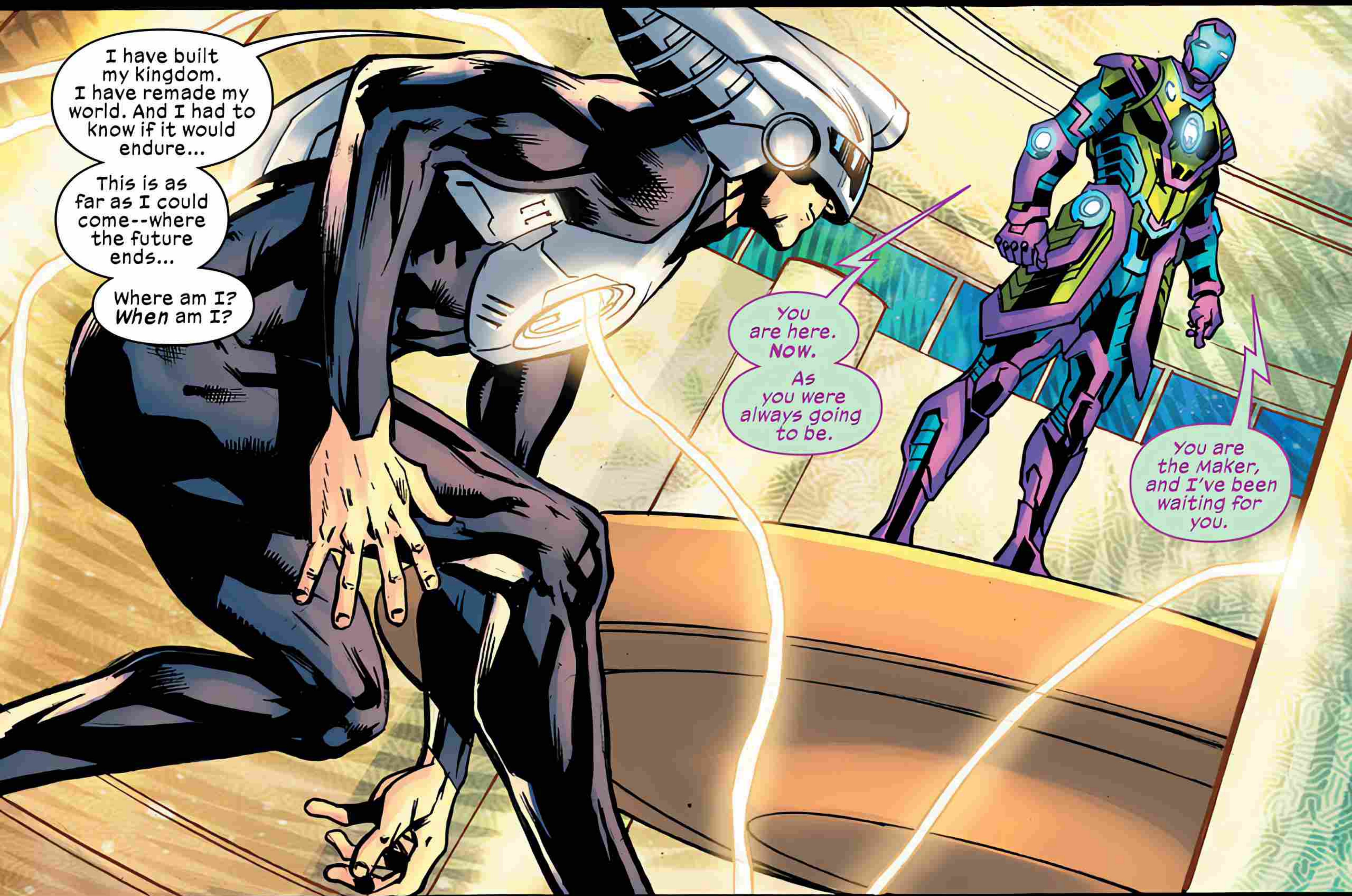
I have built
my kingdom.
I have remade my
world. And I had to
know if it would
endure...

This is as
far as I could
come--where
the future
ends...

Where am I?
When am I?

You
are here.
NOW.
As
you were
always going
to be.

You are
the Maker,
and I've been
waiting for
you.

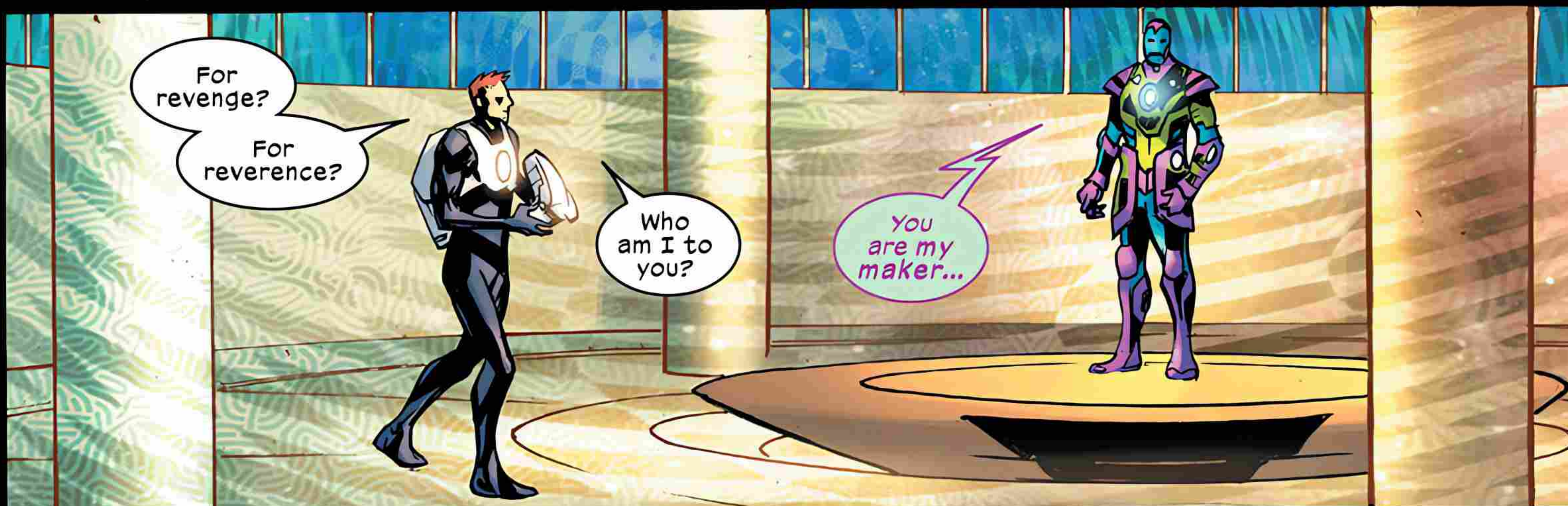


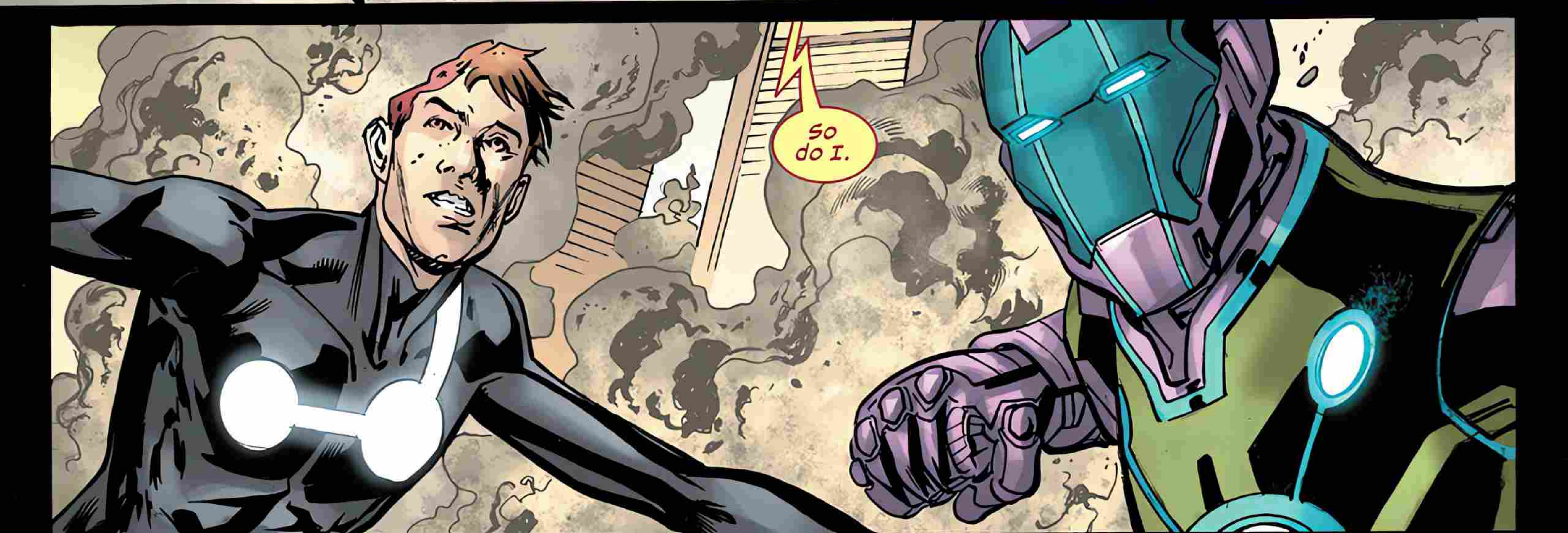
For
revenge?

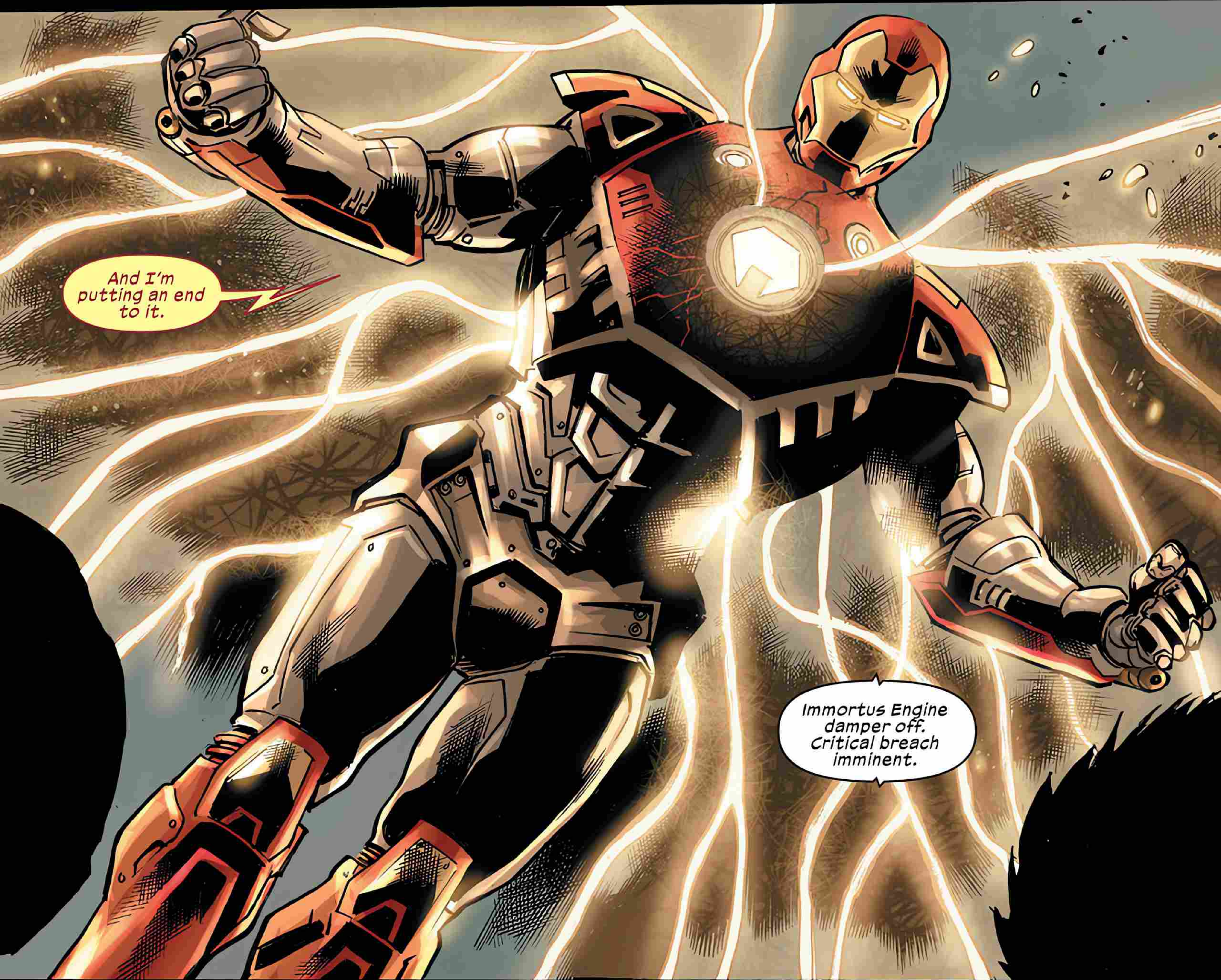
For
reverence?

Who
am I to
you?

You
are my
maker...







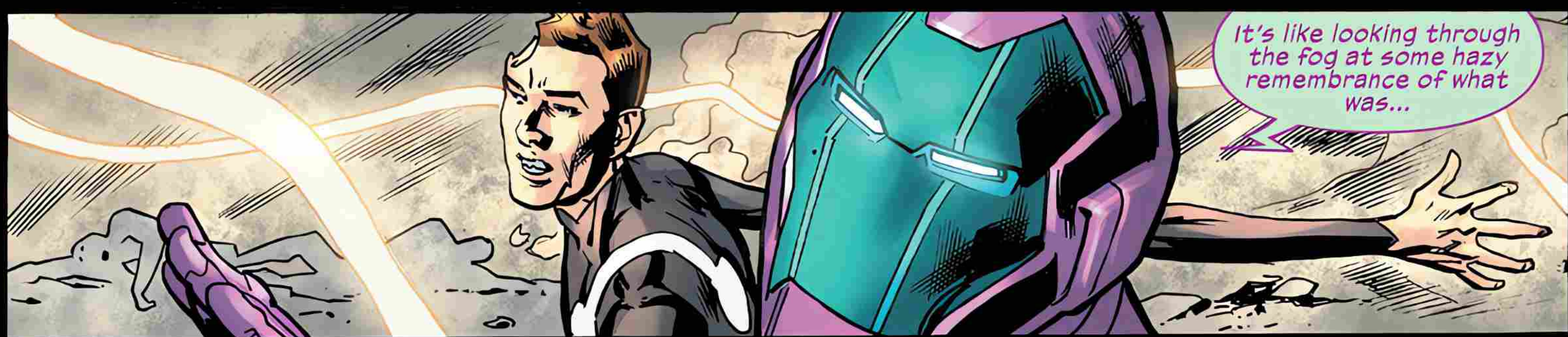
And I'm putting an end to it.

Immortus Engine damper off. Critical breach imminent.

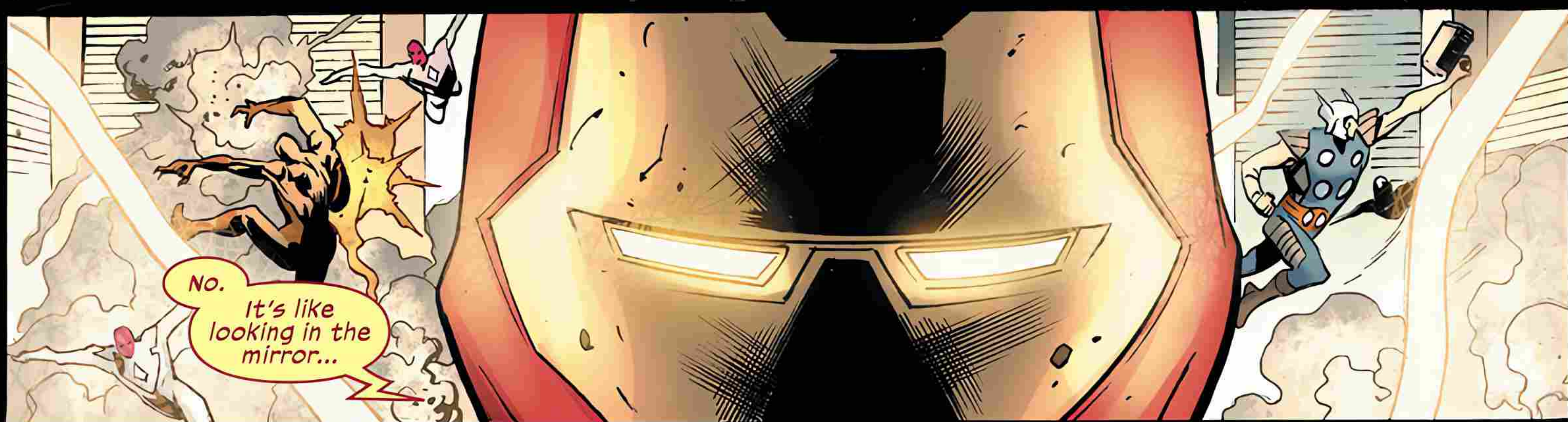


What are you doing, Stark?

Isn't it obvious? He's solving two problems at once. Just look at him. Look at how righteous he is...



It's like looking through the fog at some hazy remembrance of what was...



No. It's like looking in the mirror...



The Maker's Castle.
Latveria.

I
promised...

So
why do I
hesitate?

Is it
because I have
to consider this
might be another
prison for me?

One where
the walls are made
of obligation and not
punishment.

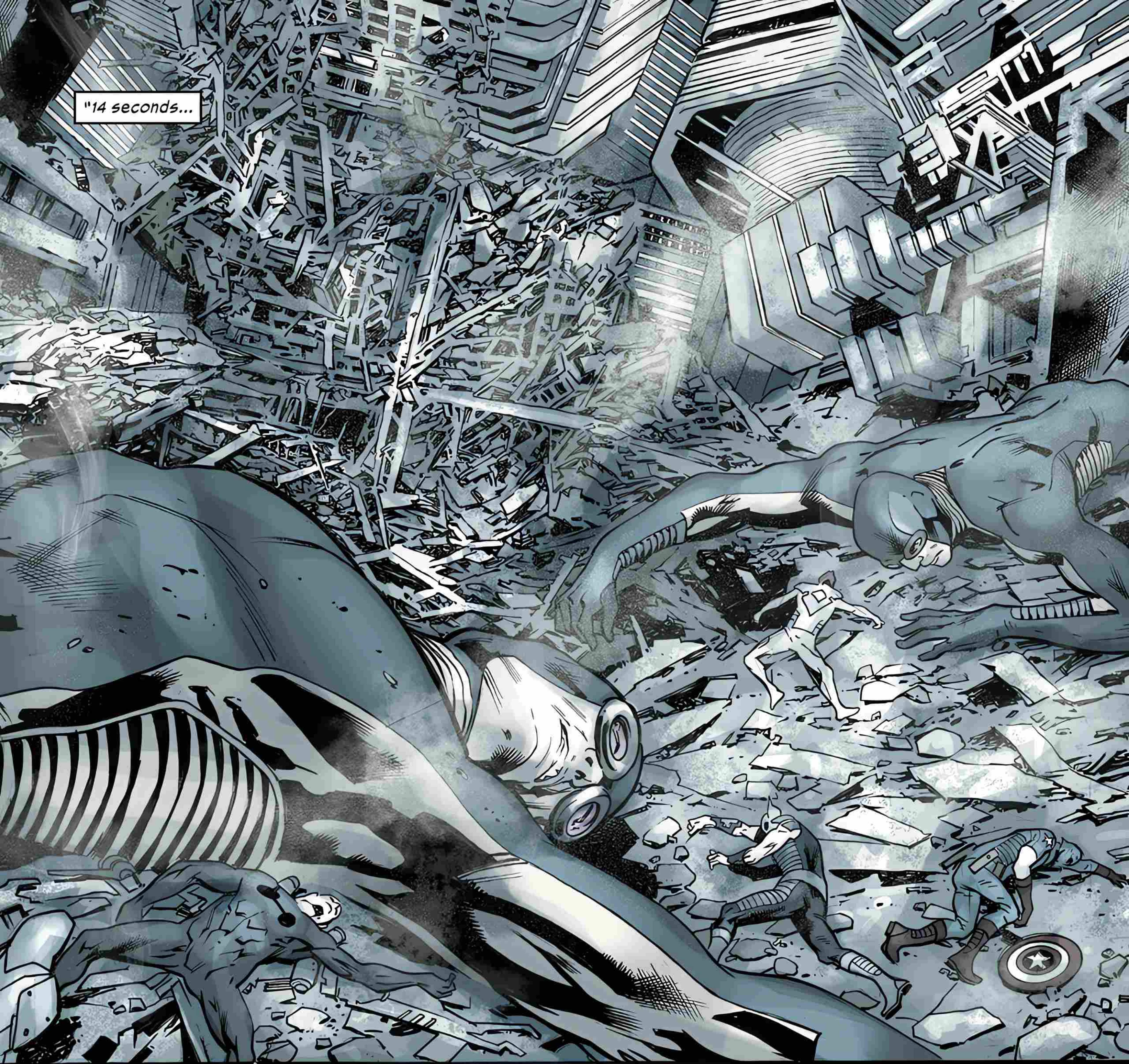
And
all-consuming in
a way that my
previous cell never
could be.

Something
broken...for
someone
broken...

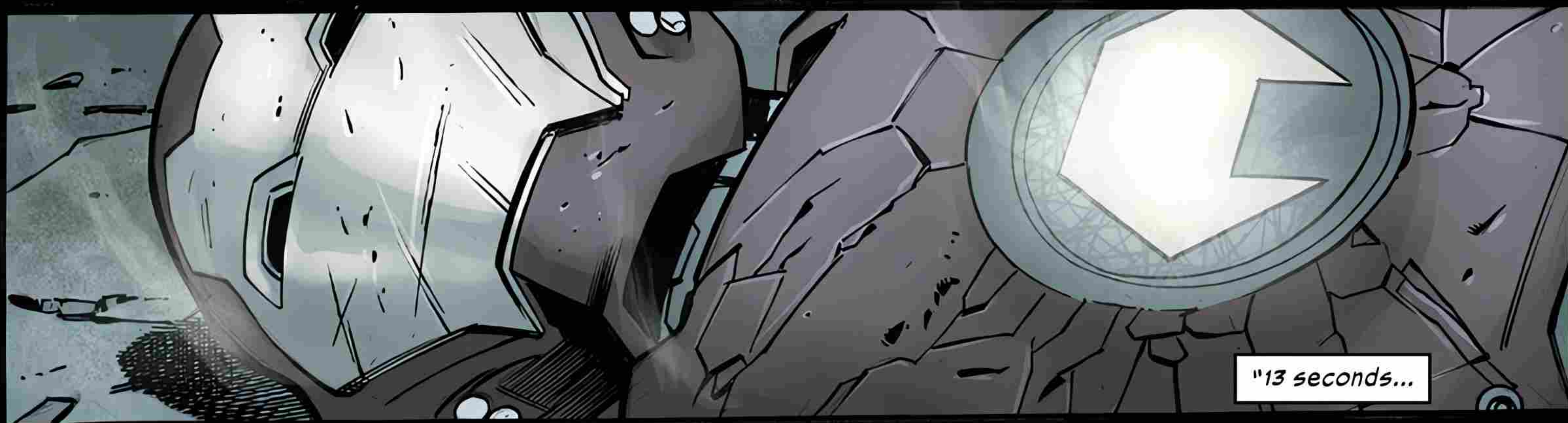
Who
can say?

The
choice I leave
to better
angels.

"15 seconds..."



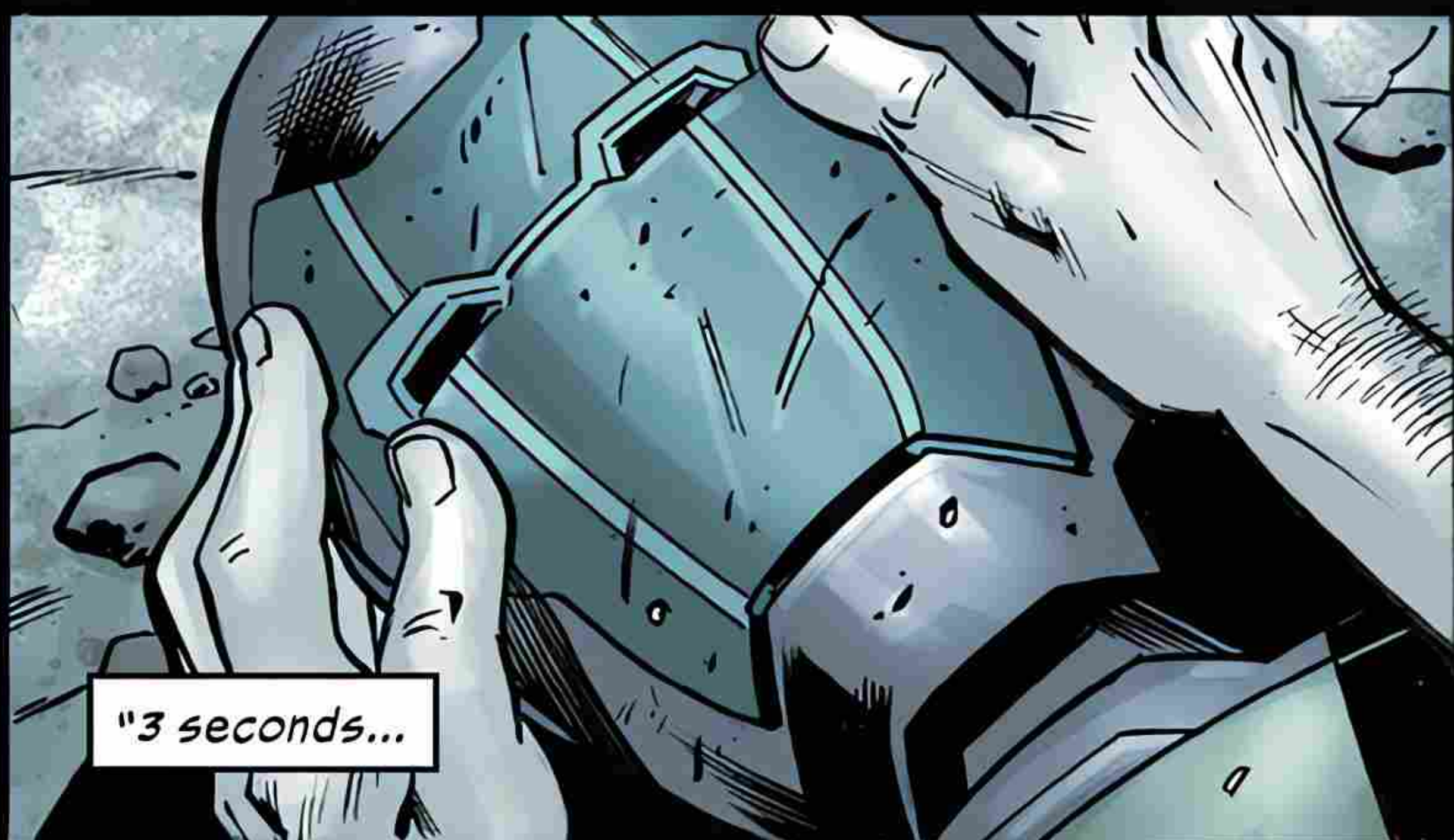
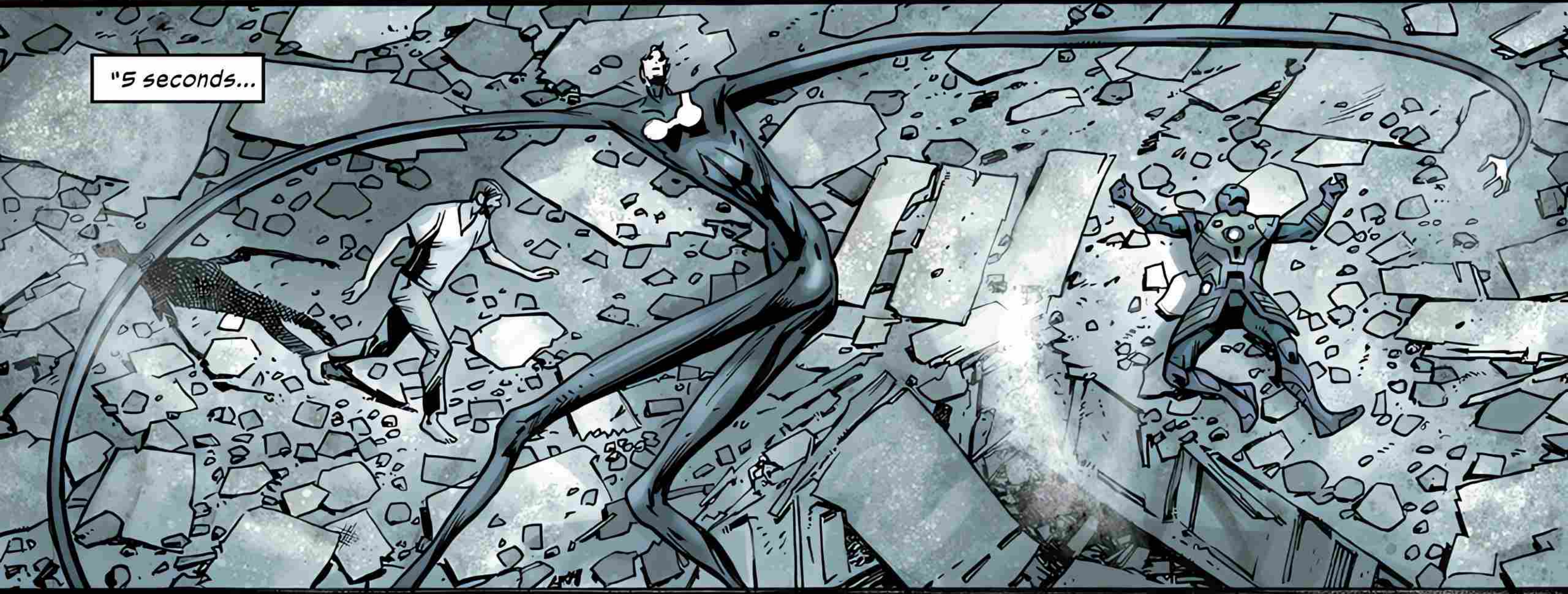
"14 seconds..."

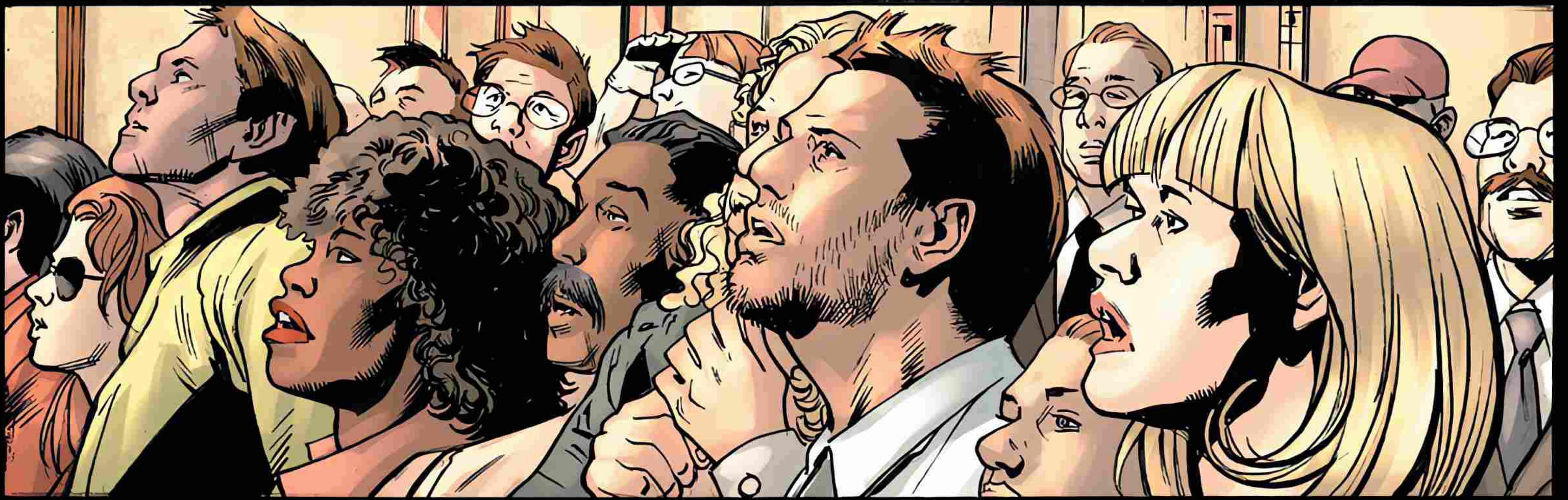


"13 seconds..."



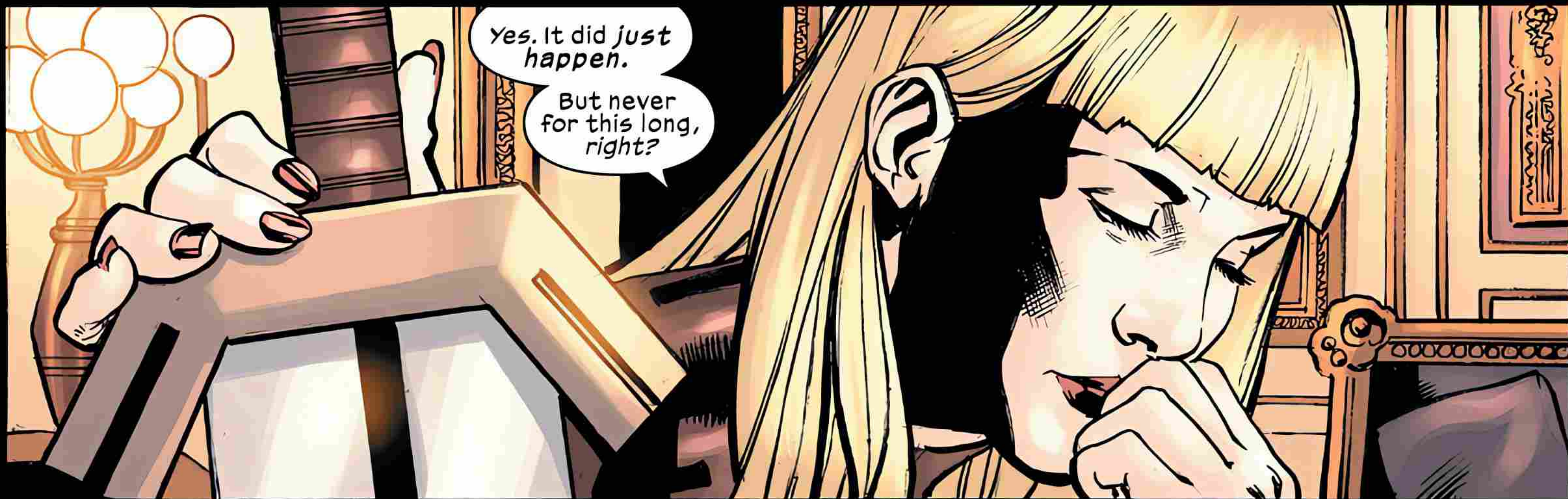
"12 seconds..."

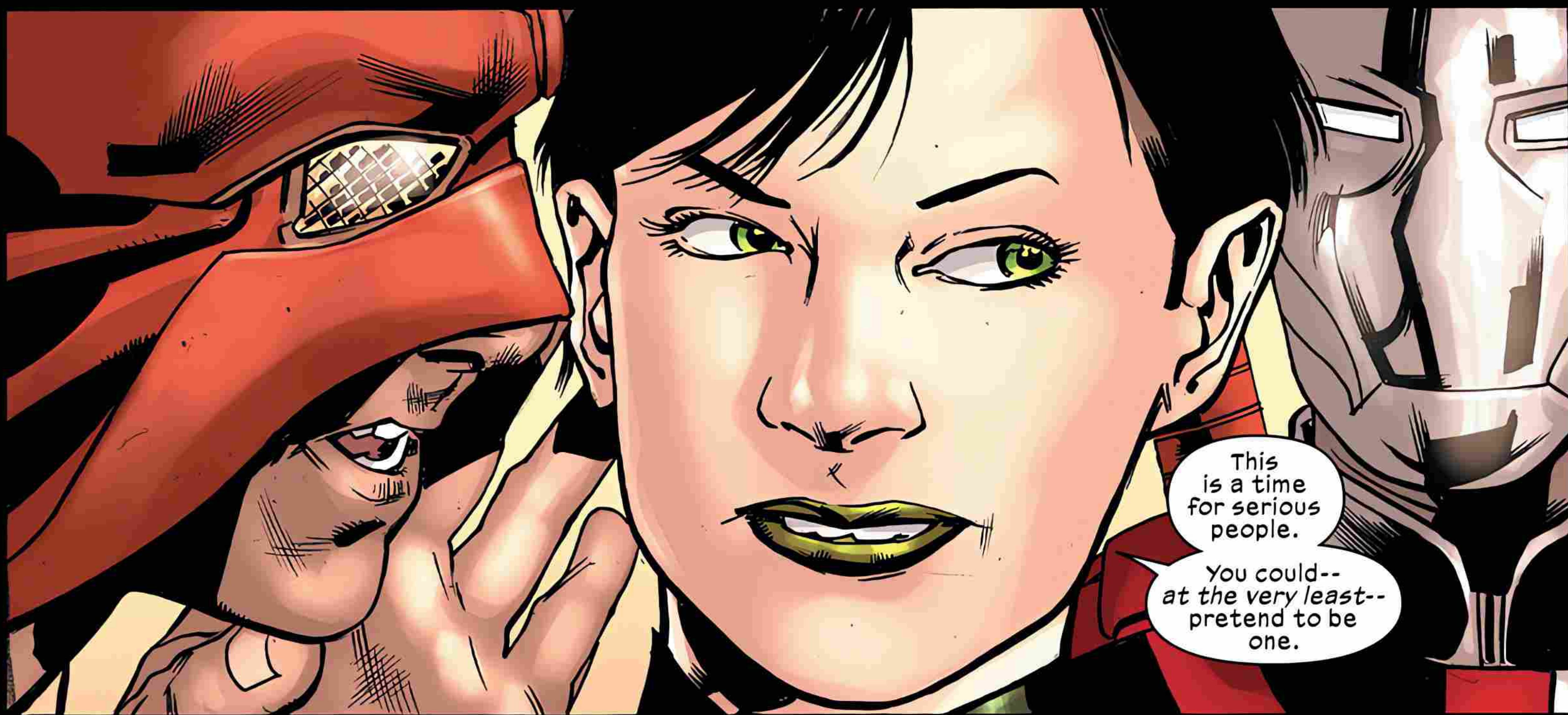
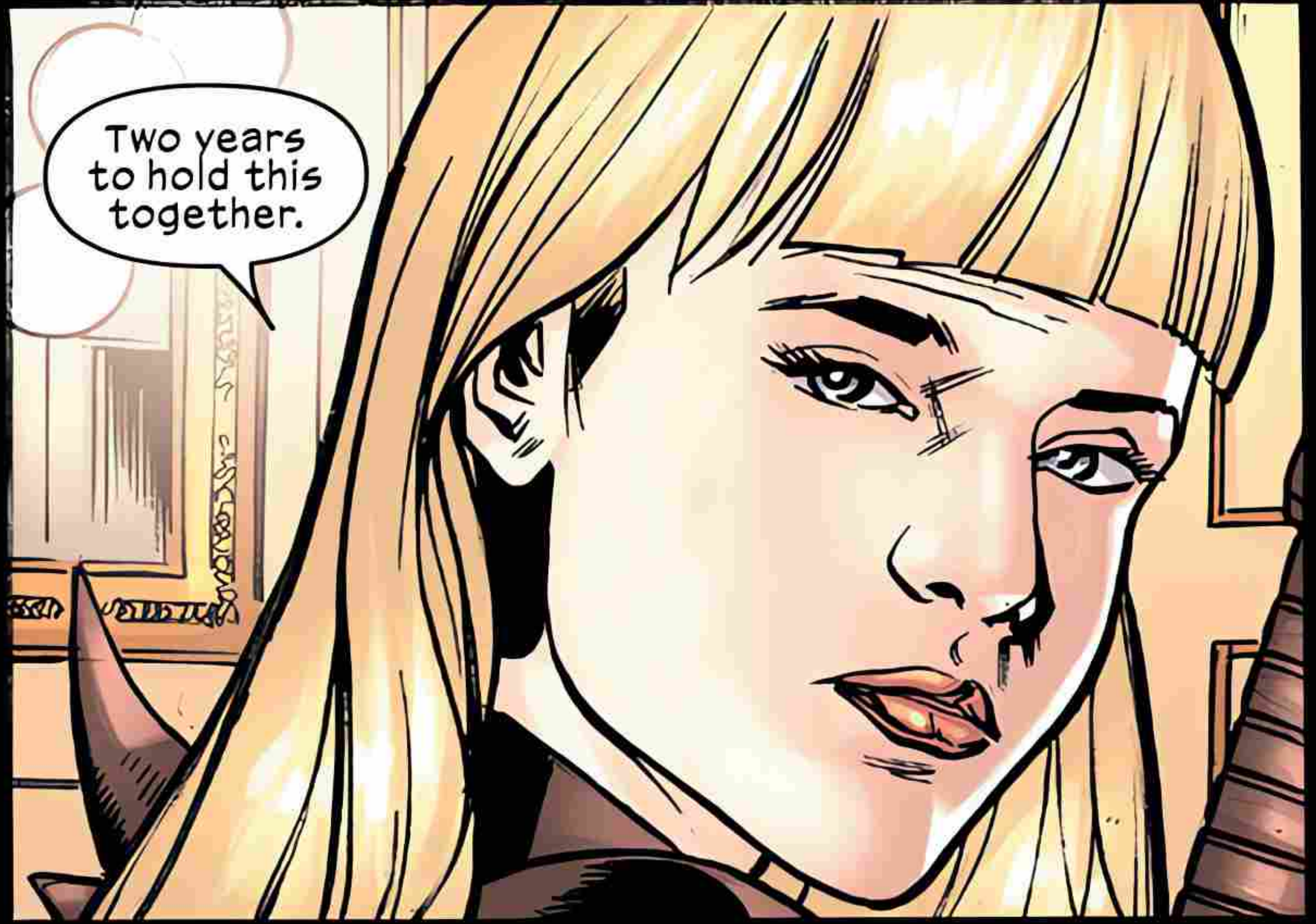




One week later.









And you shouldn't pretend like it's not a valid choice.

After all, there's no guarantee that whatever comes out of that thing when it opens remotely resembles you or me.



Or shares our hopes and desires.

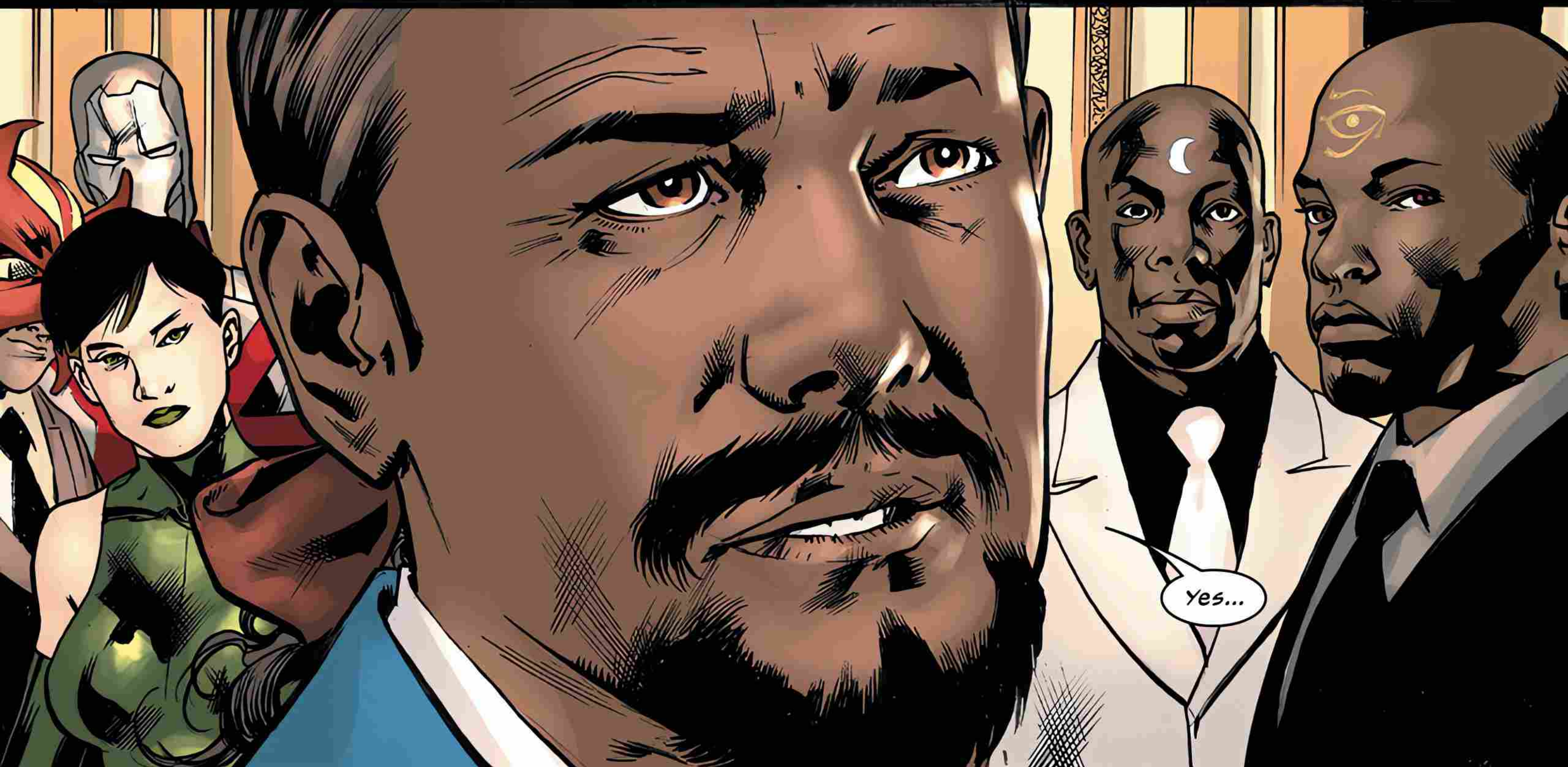
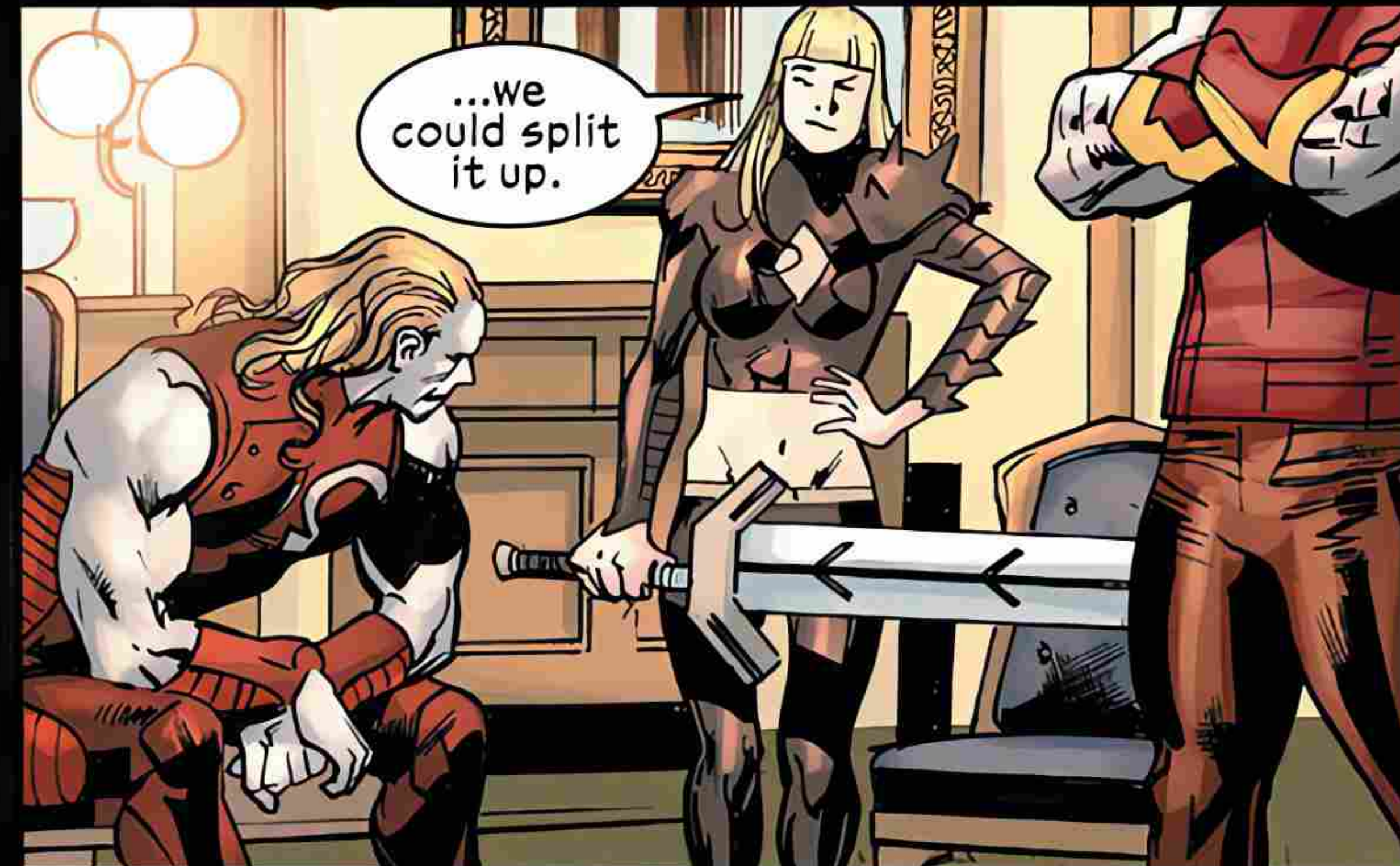
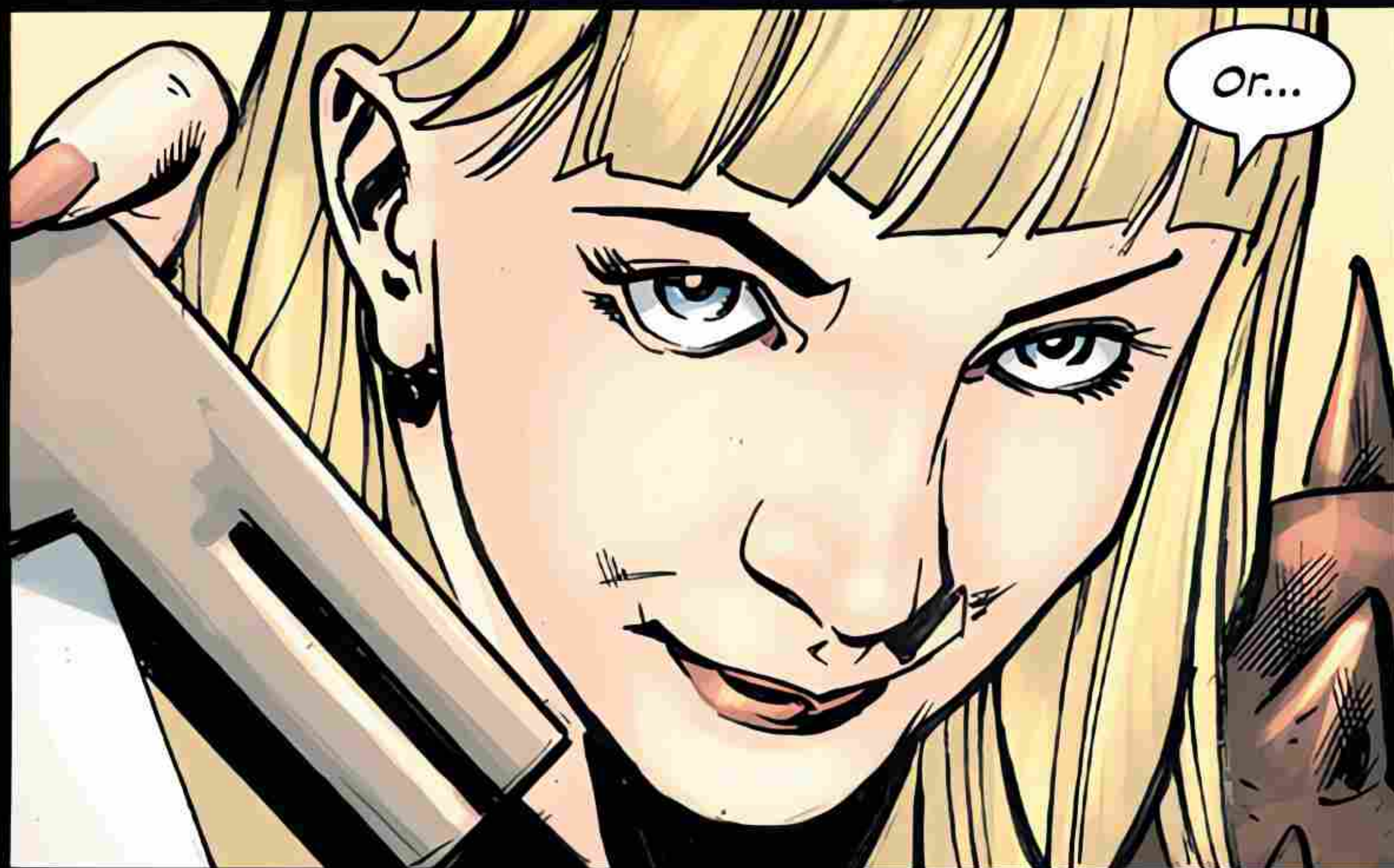


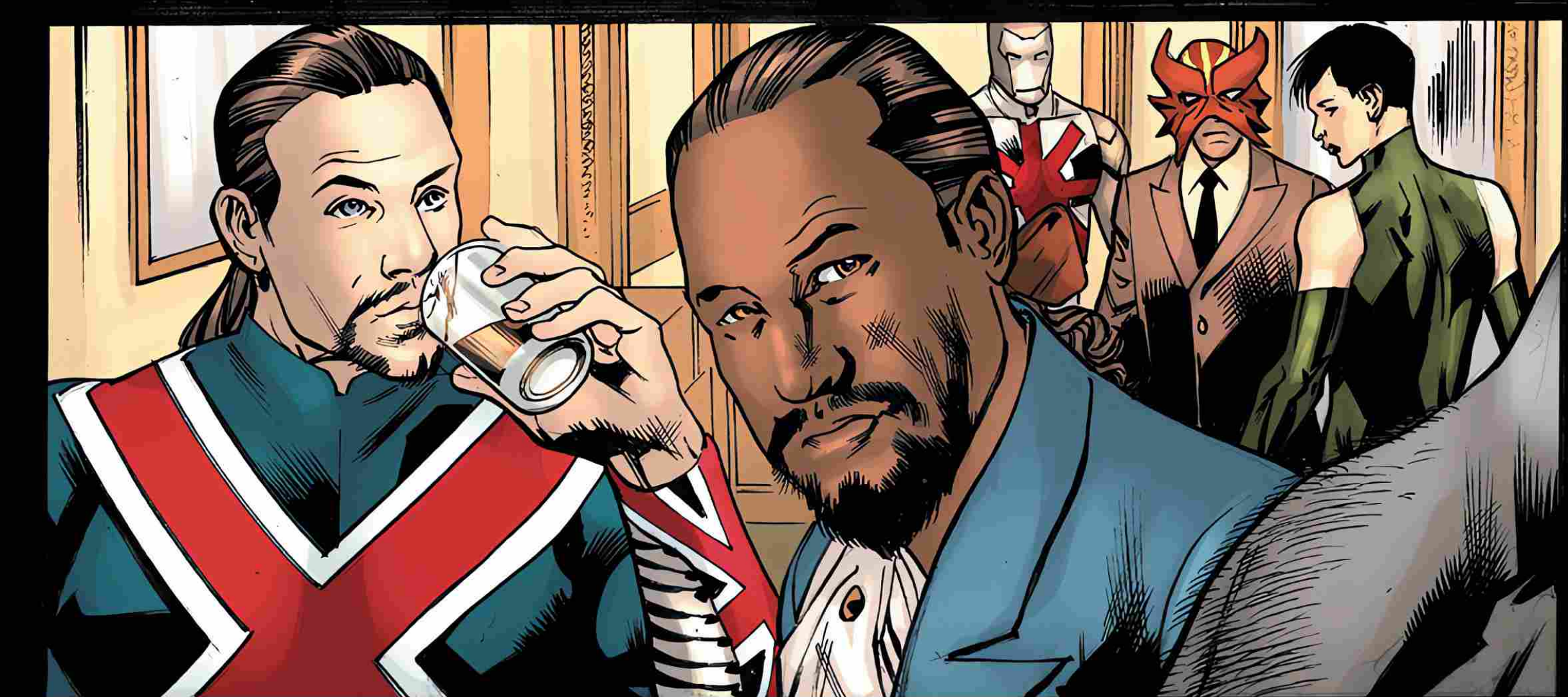
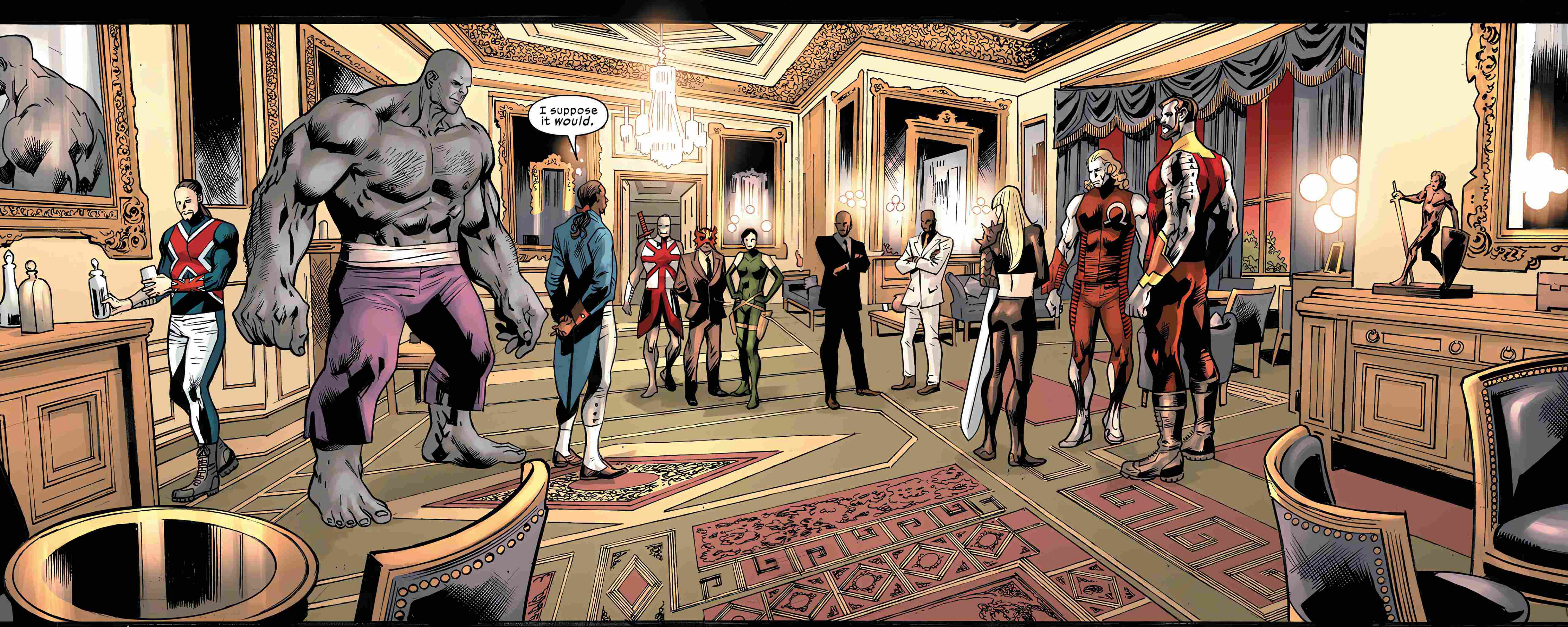
Or thinks of us as equal--as human--at all.



Well, this is clearly a subject that requires a bit more thought. Perhaps we should tackle a more short-term problem:

What do we do about America and their Union?





Stark Tower.

He gave
this to
you?

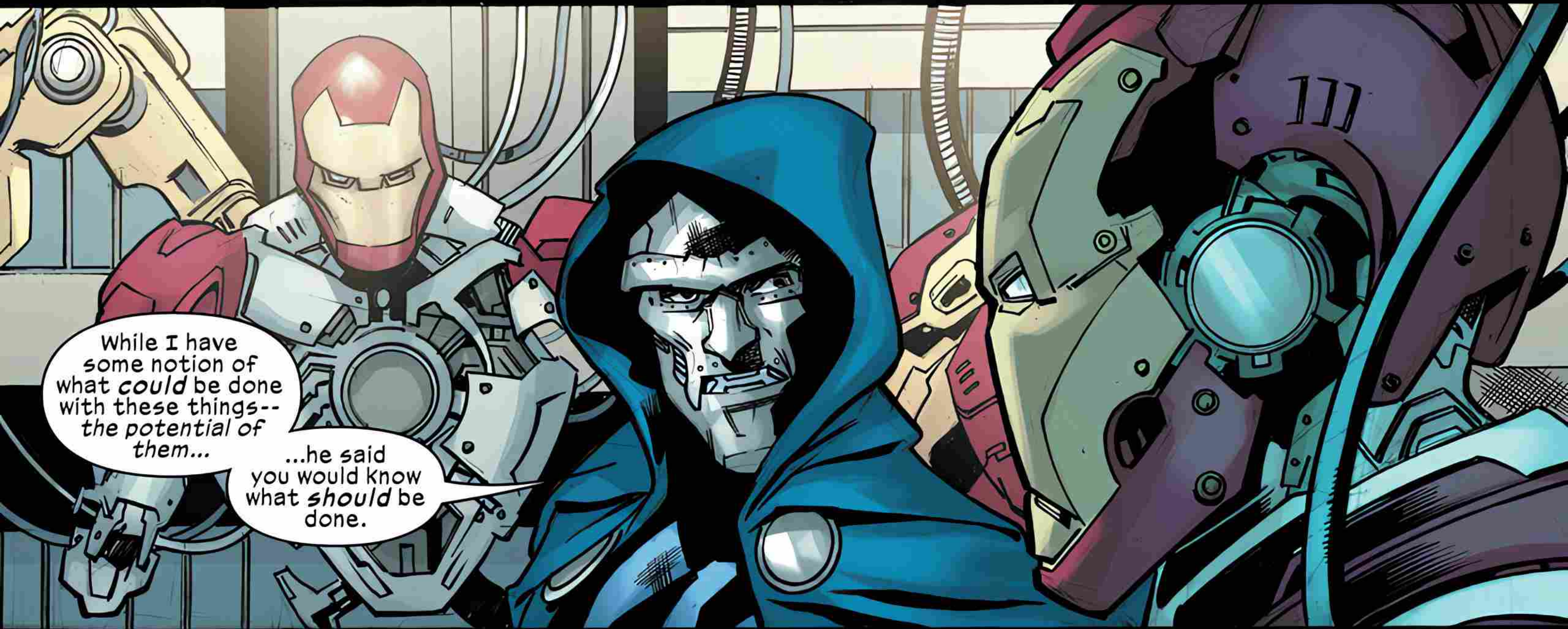
The world
was ending,
Anthony. The
future colliding
with the
now.

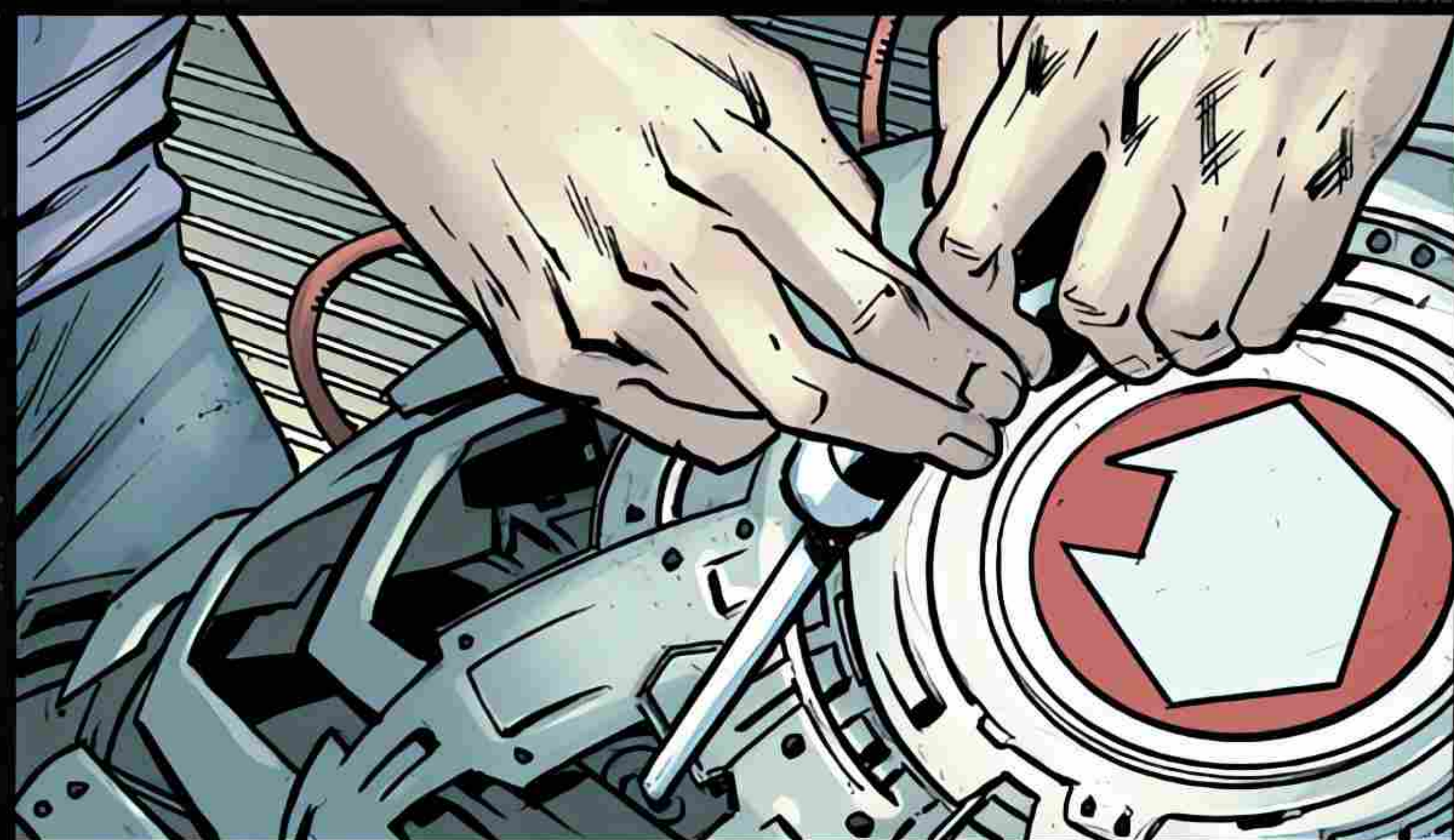
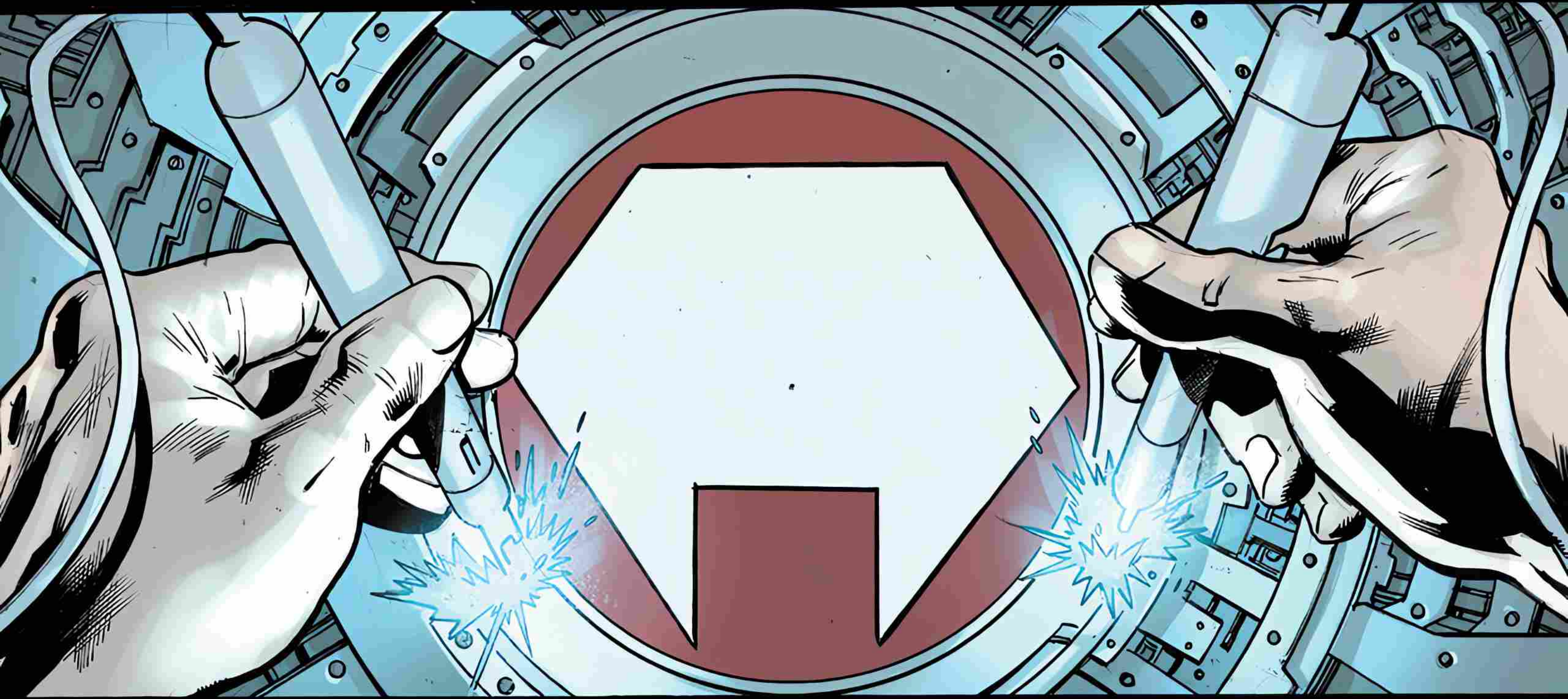
Temporal
kings were being
overthrown, and
multiversal evils
were being
undone...

But bringing
these things to
you was my *most
important
task*.

This machine--
the broken Immortus
Engine, which you and I
have already repaired--the
secret files you showed
me, and this...

A letter
from my
father.







Okay.
That should do it...



Let's get to work.
Are you ready?

Of course.
All we need is a place to start.

Well, based on the Maker's files, there were things he missed--things he couldn't find. I think I have a pretty good idea why.



And what are you going to call yourself?

Iron Man?
After your father?



No.
He's Iron Man.





6160

**EPILOGUE:
"WIN"**

The past.

My dearest
Anthony,

I am so tired
of this world.

I am so tired
of the people
in it.

Of what they
accept...

And of what
they have
become.

But I know the fault was mine.
Maybe more than most because
of my gifts and the means that
came with them.

I was so wrapped up in the good
things I was doing--the work and the
bounty that work provided us--that
I didn't care enough to notice what
was really going on in the world
I was shaping.

I know now that it is a false, fallen world that we paint as "good enough," but under its skin, we all know it is rotten to the core.

And on reflection, almost all of the things I have made do nothing but support the systems that reduce men and women to pawns and playthings...to workers and consumers...to servants and slaves.

All the things I have made are tainted with a patina of evil.

All of them but one.

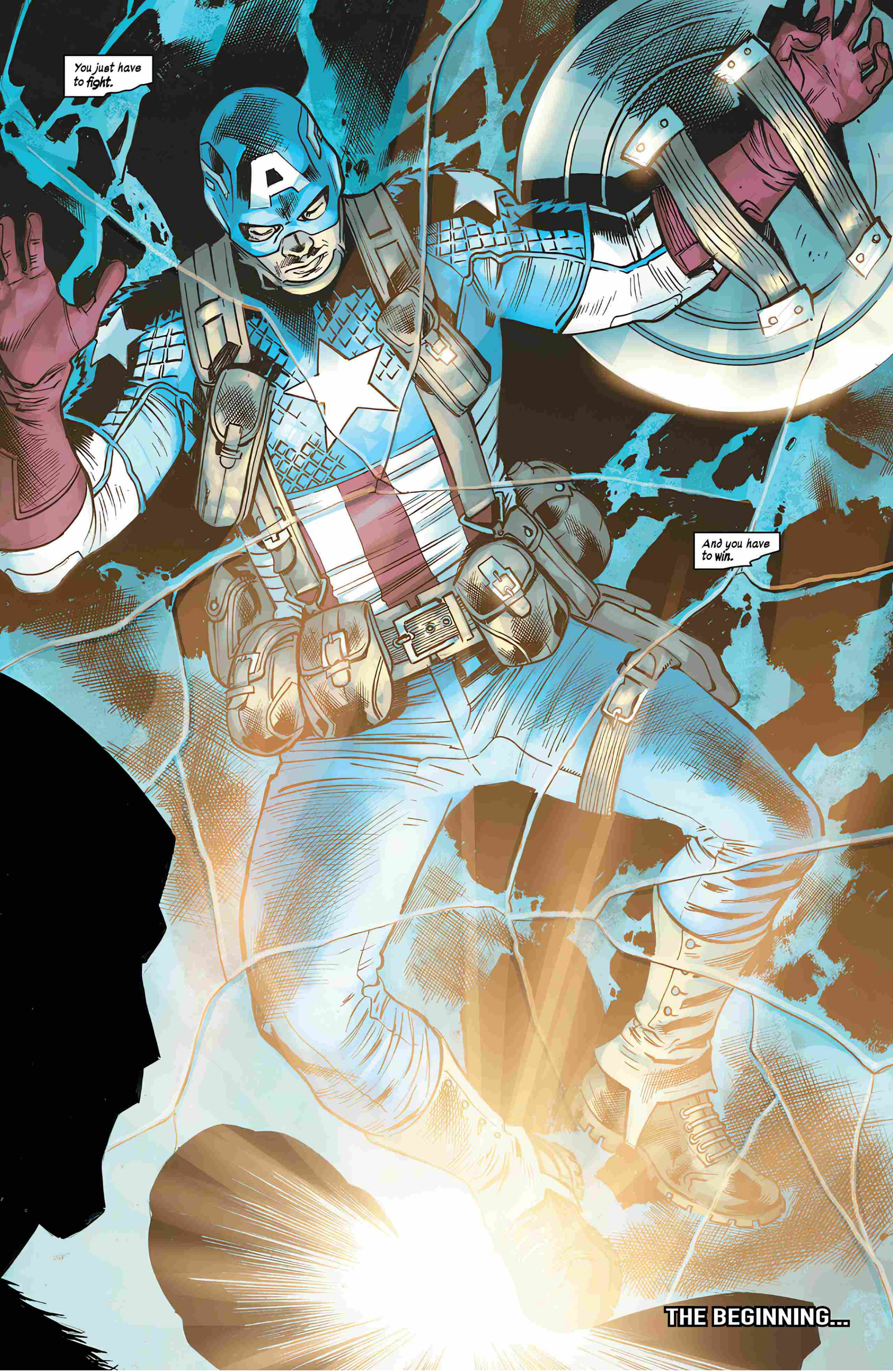
And that is you.

If this has found its way to you, then I am gone and I have left you a world that is no place for the innocent.

But only innocent eyes can see it for what it could be.

Remember, Anthony...

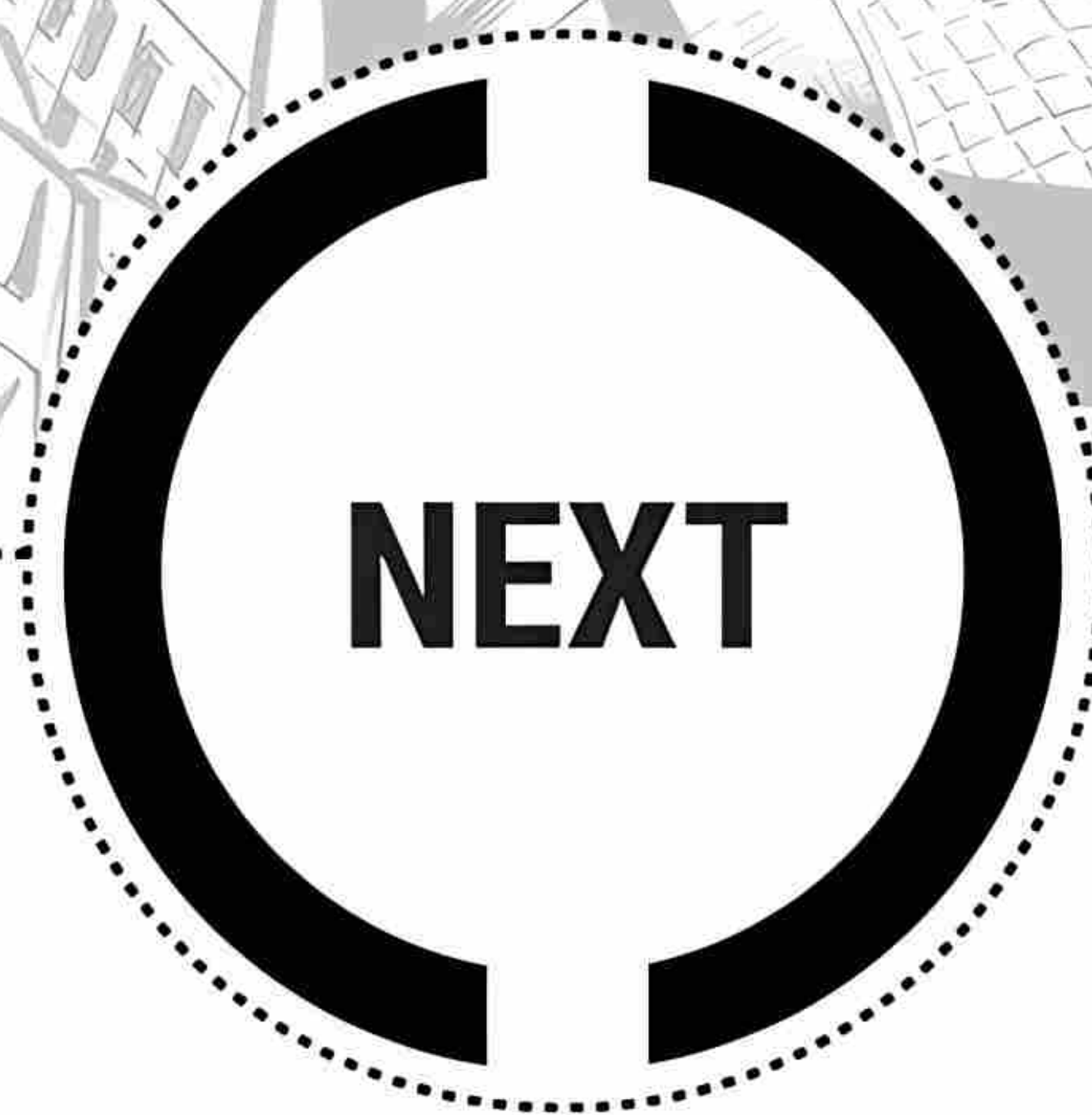
It's never too late to change the world around you...

A full-page comic book illustration of Captain America in a dynamic, action-oriented pose. He is wearing his iconic blue, white, and red uniform with a large white star on his chest and a blue helmet with a white 'A'. He is holding his shield in his left hand, which is raised high. His right arm is extended forward, and he is looking intently at the viewer. The background is a mix of blue and brown tones, suggesting a sky or a battlefield. The overall style is classic comic book art with bold lines and a rich color palette.

You just have
to fight.

And you have
to win.

THE BEGINNING...



ULTIMATE UNIVERSE

NOVEMBER 2023